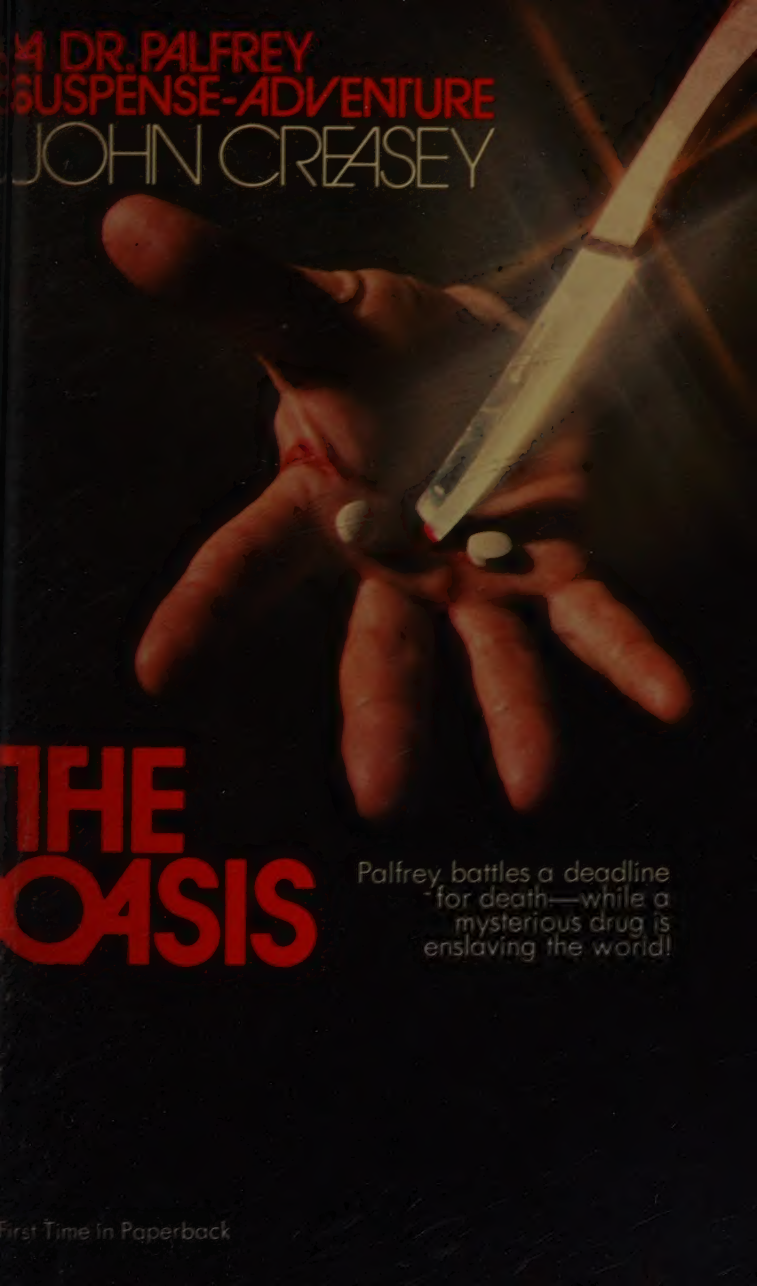
4 DR. PALFREY
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THE OASIS
Palfrey battles a deadline for death—while a mysterious drug is enslaving the world!
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"ESCAPED PRISONER MURDERED"

screamed the headlines as Dr. Palfrey walked toward Kensington Road, but they gave no hint that Eustace Morro had actually been one of Palfrey's most daring and resourceful agents. Months of preparation had gone into creating Morro's false criminal identity, and no one could possibly have penetrated it. Yet someone had—and Morro was dead.

Going over the whole affair in his mind, Palfrey crossed at the lights and reached the Hyde Park Hotel. Just as he stopped, a man came up beside him. Palfrey felt a slight pressure at his side—from a hand, a knife, a gun?—and felt a warm breath on his cheek.

"Dr. Palfrey," the man said softly, "it would be just as easy to kill you as it was to kill Morro . . ."

# THE OASIS

JOHN CREASEY

LANCER BOOKS NEW YORK

A LANCER BOOK

# THE OASIS

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Printed in Canada.

This book was published by arrangement with Walker Publishing Company, Inc. Its large sale in the hardcover edition makes possible this inexpensive reprint.

LANCER BOOKS, INC. • 1560 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036

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# 1

# THE FAT MAN

Dr. Stanislaus Alexander Palfrey, a tall, lean man, watched Mr. Justice Graven, a short, fat man, coming towards him. There were hundreds of other people in the street, London's Strand, but none so noticeable as these two in their different ways. Most of the passers-by looked at Graven—who appeared to be quite oblivious—for he was enormous. The more discerning and the more impressionable looked at Palfrey, for he stood inches above the crowd and had a very clean-cut, attractive face topped by fine, fair hair gilded by the wintry sun. Buses, cars and taxis passed, people by the hundred passed, but Palfrey and Graven were drawn towards each other as if by magnetism.

Palfrey had seen Graven through a gap in the crowds, but it was not until they were close together that Graven appeared to see Palfrey. He missed a step and two pretty, long-legged girls just behind him had to dodge out of the way.

They glared, then caught sight of Palfrey, who smiled at them; and on the instant their expressions changed, they smiled also, and, when they had passed, looked back.

"Sap!" exclaimed Mr. Justice Graven. "What a strange coincidence!"

"Really?" asked Palfrey in a pleasant, rather impersonal voice. "What's the other leg?"

"Eh?"

"Of the coincidence," explained Palfrey.

"Oh. Yes, of course. I was talking about you in chambers."

"Good things, I hope."

"Oh, very good," said Graven. "I am sitting—" He broke off, as if suddenly aware that there were others about. "But I mustn't talk in the street. Are you going anywhere in particular?"

"Not at the moment," dissembled Palfrey.

"Then let's go in here," suggested Graven.

They were outside an old and renowned public house. He led the way, as if it did not occur to him that Palfrey would demur, opened a carved oak door and hesitated at the foot of a flight of narrow oak stairs, so dark they were almost black. Clearly, he was daunted, but suddenly he grasped the newel post firmly and began to climb, pulling himself up each step by the banister rail, polished smooth by thousands of hands over hundreds of years. Palfrey followed at a discreet distance, so that he would not bump into the other at a sudden stop. But Graven laboured on, although by the time they reached the top he was gasping for breath and red in the face. Palfrey gave no sign at all of exertion. Graven drew in several deep breaths, then turned into a room in which cubicles led off on either side, narrow tables laid for the beer-and-cheese or the wine-and-cheese lunches for which the inn was famous. He paused at one which had bottle-glass windows at the far end, and began to squeeze in. He sat down at last, his paunch indented several inches by the table, the glasses, bottles and cutlery still shaking at the impact.

Breathing heavily, he glared from fine grey eyes, half-hidden by the flesh about them, at the four-inch gap between Palfrey's flat stomach and the dark oak table. He essayed speech.

"You don't—know how lucky—you are!" Each phrase came out with bullet-shot speed, and once finished he subsided, placing his hands on the table. They were

well-shaped hands, although too plump, the nails beautifully shaped and groomed, a gold ring on the little finger of the left hand deeply embedded in flesh. "I suppose you can—eat anything."

"Within reason," admitted Palfrey. "Don't you?"

"Oh, I *do*. But look at me."

Palfrey studied him but made no comment. Yet in his mind he went back thirty years, to the time they had first met at Cambridge, played in the same teams, each winning a blue at cricket and a half-blue at lacrosse. Graven had been stockily-built and solid, with big and powerful shoulders and equally powerful legs. Even in those days he had been noticeable, not only because of his figure but because he had been one of the most valuable and versatile members of the Union. Now, Palfrey noted that the only thing which was not affected by his superfluous flesh was his nearly black and luxurious hair, brushed straight back from his forehead.

A waiter appeared, an elderly, grey-haired, white-aproned Cockney.

"What can I do for you, gents?"

"I shall have a Guinness and a dozen Whitstables," decided Graven. "And the Stilton to follow."

The waiter's unsurprised gaze shifted to Palfrey.

"Stilton and Brown Bess," he ordered.

"Is that all, sir?"

"Yes, thanks."

The waiter went off, and Graven grumbled:

"*You* don't have to diet."

"I had a late breakfast."

"Coffee and toast, no doubt."

"Bacon, eggs, sausages—"

"Stop, stop!" pleaded Graven, raising a hand palm-outwards. "I can't bear it. Stop—" He leaned forward in a conspiratorial way. "You'll hardly believe why I wanted this talk. I'm trying a man who might be you."

"To look at?" inquired Palfrey mildly.

"Good God, no! But the life he's led—"

"The Rake's Progress?" suggested Palfrey.

"Don't jest, old man. I tell you, this man is remarkable. He's travelled every corner of the world, been involved in espionage since he was about sixteen, twice been before a firing squad and reprieved at the last moment. Astonishing, quite astonishing."

"What's he been accused of?" inquired Palfrey. He did not give the slightest clue that he knew the answer perfectly well.

"Burglary," answered Graven.

"Very prosaic," remarked Palfrey, as if disappointed. "Is he guilty?"

"Oh, I think so."

"What does the jury think?"

"You never can tell with juries," mourned Graven, with some resignation, "but if he isn't found guilty I'll swear he has friends in the box. No, no, only my joke—he's as guilty as a man can be, caught red-handed with several thousand pounds' worth of jewellery in his pockets, stolen from the very place where he was caught. He—"

The waiter appeared with the oysters and stout, and Graven shook open his table napkin and began to eat with uncontrolled gusto. Yet there was a certain delicacy about the way the food was dispatched, as about all his movements. Palfrey, truly not hungry, toyed with Stilton of perfect ripeness, and smooth brown ale.

At last, the oysters had gone.

"Nothing like Whitstables," Graven declared smugly. "I was in New York a month or two ago. Their blue points aren't a patch on 'em. Good, mind you, but there's nothing like Whitstables. How are *you*, Sap?"

"Oh, busy as a bee espionaging in every corner of the world," said Palfrey, lightly.

"No, seriously." Graven gouged out Stilton, which crumbled very slightly as he placed it on his plate.

"At peace," answered Palfrey.

"No major world crises for you to go and stave off, eh?"

"No known major world crises."

"And your department? How is that getting on? Active as ever?"

"Noses to the grindstone, and all as sober as judges," Palfrey reported.

"Yours is the most un-secret secret service I've ever heard of," Graven remarked. "I suppose if it wasn't I would never have heard of it! Things *do* seem a bit quieter on the world front, though, don't they? No one seems anxious to blow the other chap up—for fear of being blown up himself, I suppose. Fear does seem to be the ultimate deterrent. I suppose you'd be the first to know if there were any trouble in the offing."

"I might and I might not," Palfrey said soberly. "I'm intrigued by this man you're trying, Joe. If he's as good as you seem to imply, how did he get himself caught?"

"The woman in the case," Graven answered.

"Woman?"

"He was having an *affaire* with the mistress of the house he burgled, and when she caught him he thought he could persuade her to cover up for him. But she wouldn't play. She would betray her husband with her body but when it came to his worldly goods she was the soul of honour. And pride, no doubt. Queer things, women."

"Some of them don't like being owned, body, soul and chattels," Palfrey remarked. "I rather like the sound of her."

"You'd more than rather like the look of her!" Graven's eyes glowed, obviously his high estate did not make him impervious to beauty in the witness box. Then his expression changed, and he said almost diffidently: "Do you know, Sap, we haven't met since Drusilla died."

"No," Palfrey agreed, quietly.

"You've never—never thought of marrying again?"

"I've thought of everything under the sun," answered Palfrey with a faint smile. "No need to be sorry for me any longer, Joe. It's ten years ago, remember." *

"I suppose it must be. *Tempus fugit,* now as then. And of course that reminds me that I must get back. Came out for some fresh air, haven't seen the daylight for weeks—had two week-ends on the Royal Commission on Hanging." He looked unwinkingly at Palfrey. "Amazing things happen to the world—it's as resilient as people."

"Nice phrase," Palfrey approved. "As resilient as people! Joe, it's been good to see you."

Graven unwedged himself, setting the table a-clatter again, and as Palfrey joined him he shook hands, and said:

"You're the only man I've met in years who hadn't read me the riot act about my weight, the high incidence of coronaries or the sinister qualities of cholesterol. The thinner they are the shriller the accent, usually."

"I know what you mean," Palfrey said. "I'm a fellow sufferer."

"You? Don't talk nonsense!"

"They all tell me I should put some weight on," explained Palfrey.

Graven's deep laughter followed him down the stairs, echo of days gone by.

Palfrey did not look back at the huge, squat figure, but carried it in his mind's eye as he walked towards Trafalgar Square, where pigeons by the thousand were clucking and gurgling in the sun, feeding out of the hands of children and of bird-lovers to whom this was home from home. The fountains played, the lions stared as blindly as Nelson over a London that a hundred and sixty-seven years had changed beyond recognition.

Palfrey turned his back on Nelson and the lions alike, and walked along Whitehall.

He loved this view, with Big Ben and the Houses of

* *The Drought*—a Dr. Palfrey story.

Parliament at the far end, and the massive buildings on either side, the newly cleaned stone of the Horse Guards, the austere simplicity of the Cenotaph. Now he turned off, near Downing Street, and entered a building by a narrow doorway on one side.

Soon he was in the office of a man, tall, blind and bold, whom he had known all his life, one of the most permanent of permanent secretaries in the Foreign Office.

"I didn't go into the Old Bailey," Palfrey said. "I ran, by design, into Joe Graven, who is hearing the case. He takes Morro's guilt for granted, and I'm sure he would be the first to suspect anything phoney. Everything is all right, I think."

"Good," said the P.S. "How long do you want Morro to stay in prison before he escapes?"

"Two months should be enough," answered Palfrey.

"In two months you will have him back on your books," the other promised.

"You'll see that he gets preferential treatment, without the other prisoners knowing, won't you?" asked Palfrey. "I wouldn't like him to come out with the slightest chip on his shoulder."

"I'm sure he will be well looked after," said the Permanent Secretary reassuringly. "Don't worry. May I ask what particular mission you want him for?"

"Better not," advised Palfrey, and went out.

Soon he was sitting back in a taxi and heading for the Elite Hotel in Mayfair. This was one of the big, new, plush hotels built to cater for the increasing flood of tourists from all over the world, particularly from the United States of America. A great number of people knew that he rented the pent-house on the top of the building, but very few realised that he spent little of his time there. He lived and worked in the mammoth subterranean headquarters of Z5, the organisation to which Mr. Justice Graven had referred. In fact, Z5 was much more secret than Graven realised, even though it had, from

time to time, become involved in a number of acute world crises, some of which had been revealed to the general public.

The public, however, were shown only a very small tip of the iceberg.

Palfrey went into one of the many small, self-operated lifts, which to many appeared to serve only the hotel apartments but which in fact—and when operated by a special key—went deep down into the bowels of the earth.

There were three floors to these subterranean headquarters of Z5, built in great secrecy after the hotel had been finished.

One, the first, was general and administrative. Records of people, dossiers, details of the staff of embassies and consulates of every country and a surprisingly complete record of the secret service establishments of the world were kept there. On the next and middle floor were the general headquarters for the senior staff, the actual operations centre of the organisation; and below that again the laboratories and research establishments, including interrogation rooms and cells.

Palfrey stopped at the middle floor.

He walked along a narrow passage, past many closed doors, knowing that his progress was closely followed by television eyes and by electronic recorders. No movement in Z5 went unobserved, far too much of vital importance to the safety of Britain and of the world went on there.

It was perhaps the only place in Britain where the interests of the nation came second to the interests of the world.

Palfrey led not a British but a world secret service, and the cost of running the department was shared by all nations, including the United States, China, India and the U.S.S.R. No single country was unrepresented among its agents, for in Z5 all nations had common cause. What

the nations did in their own unilateral relationships, whether they were officially at peace or at war, was not Palfrey's immediate business. His deep concern was the fact that, by the development of weapons of all kinds, power of every conceivable variety was made practicable for single individuals or small groups to hold the world to blackmail, even to control it absolutely.

Some had been defeated without difficulty, and practically no one had known about the plot of world conquest, or Z5's part in defeating it. Some had come so near success that the whole world had had to know—hence the world's knowledge of some of the battles which Palfrey fought and won. It was true, as Graven had remarked, that on the surface the world was more peaceful today than it had been for many years, but Palfrey knew only too well that the globe could be at peace and unthreatened one day, and in acute peril the next.

With a world-wide chain of agents, most of them doing their daily job while serving Z5, Palfrey was informed of any suspicious situation—anything which might develop into a threat. And the activities of a certain Professor Augustus Dioll had been brought to his notice several months before.

Dioll, who had once held the Chair of Marine Biology at Winburn University, had led an expedition to the West Coast of Africa, just south of Biafra. Soon after his return he had resigned his Chair and gone to live in Southampton, where he had a small but extremely well-equipped laboratory. He was known to have very little money; someone, therefore, had sponsored him; someone who spent very freely.

What made such expenditure worth while?

It was possible that he had made some kind of discovery off the African coast, which would explain his now secret researches. Experience told Palfrey that no one put up a substantial sum of money for any project unless there was a reasonable hope of substantial returns. Obvi-

ously, the research might be for commercial purposes, but commercial enterprises were seldom cloaked with a secrecy which defied a powerful secret service organisation. Palfrey knew well that Dioll sometimes flew to Accra and then on to some unknown destination near the coast. He disappeared often for weeks at a time.

One of Palfrey's West African agents, a Nigerian Customs Officer, had discovered and reported that Dioll and a small band of African divers were mining just off-shore at a certain spot on the coast. Nothing suggested the obvious commercial motive: diamond mining and distribution outside the tightly controlled Diamond Ring. After making the report, the Nigerian agent had disappeared. His body had been found among the charred ruins of a small hotel in Accra, but an autopsy proved that he had been poisoned.

Palfrey had detailed two more agents to watch Dioll, and both had died from "accidents" which had all the indications of murder. They had sent almost identical reports: Dioll employed anyone he could get, including ex-mercenaries of the Congo and Angola rebellions, to dive for him, and was always in need of divers.

Until he knew what Dioll was doing, Palfrey did not want to make any open move against the man; instead, he wanted an agent who had a sound chance of worming himself into Dioll's confidence. The risk of being murdered was very high, so a man of exceptional courage and resource was needed—and Morro was just such a man. He had served Z5 two or three times, on small assignments, and been screened and approved. Moreover, he was a deepsea diver, had been a Royal Navy frogman, and had trained for service in midget submarines. After leaving the navy he had spent a year with an expedition not unlike Dioll's, but off the Indian Coast. During this time he had learned a great deal about marine biology.

The problem had been to bring Morro and Dioll together.

A way had opened, not wholly satisfactory, but offering at least a chance. Dioll had a daughter, described as "unbelievably plain" who lived with a Mrs. Harvey-Lee, at a London home in Knightsbridge. Morro, a handsome, gay and gallant man, had insinuated himself into Mrs. Harvey-Lee's affections and become her lover. It had been as simple as that.

"She's a remarkable woman," Morro had told Palfrey. "I'm not at all sure she *has* a husband although she talks of him sometimes, as 'Victor'. I've a feeling that she uses the name as a kind of discipline. 'Do what I want or I'll send for my husband' kind of thing. In one way she's the easiest person in the world to get to know, in another she's quite inscrutable."

And later:

"News, Sap, news! Ida Dioll doesn't just work for her, she's a kind of niece twice or thrice removed. It's an 'Aunty dear' relationship."

And later still:

"I'm not getting anywhere, Sap. I need to make a breakthrough to Dioll, and I've an idea. If I stage a robbery there and let myself get caught red-handed, I'll be right under their thumb. If Dioll will ever contact me, he surely will then."

But instead, Mrs. Harvey-Lee had sent for the police.

Palfrey had broached the "escape from prison" proposal, for Morro's sentence could not be remitted, and "escape" followed eventually by a Queen's Pardon, after Palfrey knew what there was to know about Dioll, was the only course open. This had to be chalked up as yet another failure with Dioll, and it greatly increased suspicions of his activities. At least, now, there was a contact through Mrs. Harvey-Lee.

Yet she was another source of mystery.

In the little time at Z5's disposal, it had not been possi-

ble to find out much about her. She was a distant relative of Dioll by marriage, aunt to Ida Dioll by courtesy, not blood. She had taken the large house in Donegal Square over seven years ago, as Mrs. Harvey-Lee, but had signed all the documents of conveyance herself; apparently she was very rich. Although she talked of her husband—not only to Morro but to others—no one appeared to know him.

Baffled, Palfrey did what he always did when he reached an *impasse*: left the facts to soak into his mind, counting on his subconscious to add them up to the right answer.

On the evening of his meeting with Graven, he found a copy of the London *Evening News* on his desk and read in the *Stop Press:*

*Eustace Morro found guilty and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Notice of appeal is being considered.*

"I wonder why she gave him away to the police," Palfrey mused. "Did she know what he was really after? If she did, she and Dioll know a hell of a lot."

## 2

# THE THIN MAN

Eustace Morro lay on his narrow bed in his narrow cell at the West London prison, a new building reputed to have an escape-proof security which no prisoner could outwit. There had, in the past, been some sensational get-aways, but the latest measures had made it all but impossible, and Morro speculated, idly, on how they would arrange his. It did not occur to him to doubt that it would be arranged, because Palfrey's man had promised him that it would, and he had absolute faith in Z5.

He knew some things about the prospective escape; for one thing, it would be soon, as he had already been here for two months.

Once safely away from the prison he would go in hiding for a few days, and then he intended to contact Dioll direct. Dioll knew that he was an expert in under-water exploration, knew all his qualifications, must surely be interested in him.

So, it would be a battle of wits, about which Palfrey would know nothing.

It was not even remotely in Morro's mind to betray Palfrey or Z5, but he was a loner, he liked to do things his own way, and a streak of vanity made him want to turn apparent failure into dramatic success. Palfrey would soon know that he had not used Z5's facilities abroad, of course—but, once he had discovered the truth about Dioll, he need not fear Palfrey's wrath.

It was taking a big risk, for Dioll might refuse to deal with him, might even kill. But Morro thrived on risks.

How much Palfrey knew of Augustus Dioll, he did not

know. There was a great deal which Palfrey kept to himself, although he was said to have confided most of his secret knowledge to a computer which could interpret it, if he died. There were rumours that Joyce Morgan, his secretary—some said she was also his mistress—had a great deal of Palfrey's knowledge tucked away in her mind also; other rumours said that though different agents and department heads of Z5 knew a little of this, a little of that, none knew all the secrets.

Probably the truth was that Palfrey kept practically everything in his head, telling others only what it was strictly necessary for them to know.

D—I—O—L—L, mused Morro. He had no idea of the name's derivation and knew little about the man, although Palfrey had given him a photograph so that there was no risk of mistaken identity. Dioll was in the middle fifties, an Englishman, a widower with a daughter—Ida—in her twenties. Palfrey had not shown him a photograph of the daughter, but if she took after her father, then she must be downright ugly.

This reverie was disturbed by an unusual noise at the cell door.

Morro, startled, looked up.

Sounds travelled clearly in this part of the prison, which was on one of the major galleries. Whenever the warders walked by, one could hear even those who wore rubber heels. When he had first come here, the ceaseless to and fro, the sharp sound of iron tips, even the almost archaic clank of keys, had got on his nerves; but he was used to those noises now and no longer lay awake listening to them. He knew that some prisoners never really got used to the routine, particularly men who had committed a single crime and were not habitual criminals.

He heard the sound again—a creak. Then the door began to open, and he believed that the moment of escape had come. He did not speak. Although he had

expected it there was a great tension in him, almost fear that something would go wrong.

The door opened wide enough for a man to enter, a warder whom Morro had never seen. He carried a sack—of clothes, thought Morro. The man closed the door.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes," said Morro eagerly. "What's the drill?"

"You tie your jacket over my head and fasten my wrists, put on my clothes and walk out," the warder answered. "You'll look like a warder going off-duty, and you'll sign off as J. Carter. Others will be signing out, just do the same as they do."

"You mean—you'll take my place?" It seemed almost too easy.

"That's it. I won't be missed until morning, and nor will you. Any questions?"

"One," said Morro.

"Well?"

"What time do you go off duty?"

"Ten o'clock," the other answered, "and it's twenty minutes to now."

"Then we'd better start right away," Morro said. "Turn round."

Fifteen minutes later he crept out of the cell. Although three warders were in sight, none was looking his way. There was the closed-circuit television, of course, but his uniform and cap were sufficient disguise. There was no real excitement in this and yet there *was* excitement, there *was* tension. As he walked towards the stairs, wearing shoes with rubber soles and heels, he felt as if he were being watched, was on edge for the clangour of the alarm bell—but he heard nothing.

Two other warders went out of the prison at ten o'clock, each signing the register, each obtaining a late pass. He did exactly the same. The other two were from different parts of the prison and Morro did not recognise

them. At the main road they caught a Number 11 bus, and he caught the same bus booking as far as Hammersmith. Sitting on top of the bus he checked the wallet and found that he had twenty pounds in five pound notes, and ten in one pounds. He had some loose change, too, a packet of cigarettes, matches, some stamps and a Diners' Club credit card in the name of Morris, Evan Morris.

He slipped into a taxi within sight of the Hammersmith Police Station, and went to Waterloo. There was a late train, at about half-past eleven; he had ample time in which to catch that. He hoped he would get to Waterloo Station in time to have a drink; he was never sure what time bars opened and closed in England, they always seemed to be closed when he wanted one open. It was dark in the side streets but bright enough in the main thoroughfares; he had not been out of circulation long enough to feel any thrill at seeing bright lights, at being free. Driven along Whitehall, he saw the lions at Trafalgar Square, and the floodlit fountains, the crowds of people most of whom appeared to be aimless. He caught a glimpse of the illuminated face of Big Ben.

A few minutes later he walked on to the wide main hall of the station, where a whistle shrilled and a steam-valve screeched and tired people waited. The bars were closed, and he would have given almost anything for a drink.

The train left at 11.42, and he had a first class carriage to himself.

He lit a cigarette as they started off, leaned back and dozed. After a few minutes he was sound asleep.

After fifteen minutes, he was dead.

Palfrey sat in a comfortable winged armchair, feet up on a leather pouffe, evening paper and *The Times* open by his side, Nicholson's *The System* open but face downwards on his lap. The book-lined room was pleasantly warm, but no one would have suspected that this room

was a hundred feet below Piccadilly. The strains of Bach's Prelude in E Minor were slowly fading from his stereogram, the sound falling gently on his ears. He was not asleep, not truly dozing, but lethargic. He needed to get out of here; air-conditioning still wasn't as good as fresh air. It was not that he had been working too hard, for things were still quiet in the world, as when he had talked to Joe Graven. Palfrey was a little uneasy because of that. It was a healthy sign to have superficial troubles —"calm before storm" were words written by experience.

Tonight was the night for Eustace Morro's "escape".

Palfrey smiled; the music died away and the automatic control clicked off. The silence in the room seemed intense.

It was nearly twelve. If everything had gone according to plan, Morro would be on the train to Southampton by now. It did not seriously occur to Palfrey that anything could go wrong at this stage in the affair.

His problem was how to start again, using Mrs. Harvey-Lee or Ida. He got up and went into a small kitchen, one where he could make his own toast and coffee, even an omelette if he preferred to eat simply and alone, as he and Drusilla had done so often, so long ago.

It was surprising how vividly memory of Drusilla would come into his mind, even after ten years—as Joe Graven had reminded him. It wasn't surprising that he should think of Joe and Drusilla on this night of Morro's "escape". He took coffee and some chocolate biscuits into the living room, smiling at recollection of Graven's enormous size, as a light glowed on his desk plus a subdued ringing sound. This was the signal that an agent from outside wanted to speak to him. He moved across and picked up a pale grey telephone, one of three.

"Yes."

"Dr. Palfrey," a girl said, "Mr. Hamilton would like to speak to you urgently."

Hamilton, Palfrey thought: the man who had followed

Morro from the West London prison and would see him as far as Southampton, on his way to the Continent.

"Put him through," he said.

There was the faintest of faint clicks before Hamilton spoke. Palfrey knew on the instant that there was trouble, for the tone of Hamilton's voice was pitched high, carrying a unmistakable impression of urgency. Palfrey's right hand strayed to his forehead and he began to coil a few strands of hair round his forefinger.

"Yes?" he said again; inquiringly and also fearfully.

"He's dead," Hamilton announced brutally.

Palfrey didn't respond at once; the announcement was so totally unexpected, and hit him with such force. "He" could only be Morro, and it made no sense at all.

"How?" he asked, at last.

"Morphine, I think—certainly an opiate. He had pin-point pupils."

"When?" asked Palfrey, suddenly husky.

"When I went to check, I found him in his compartment near Woking. I wanted to check that he'd just dropped off to sleep, so I spoke to him. When he stayed put, I tried to wake him."

"Where is he now?" asked Palfrey. He pulled the strands of hair tight from his forehead, for this news was far more disquieting than the simple fact of Morro's death. Morro would not have killed himself, it would not have been an accident, so it must be murder.

He tugged at his hair until it hurt.

"I called the guard, and he's being carried on a stretcher to an ambulance now," Hamilton went on. "I can see it from this call-box in the station entrance."

"They'll be all local people," Palfrey said slowly. "No one followed him, apart from you, did they?"

"Not the slightest sign of anybody."

"Whom did he see after leaving the prison?"

"The bus conductor—a young Jamaican—three passengers on top of the bus and a taxi driver. Oh—and the

ket collector at the Waterloo barrier." Hamilton's voice e even higher in a piercing whisper. "He's in the am- lance and they're closing the doors."

"Is there a taxi handy?"

"I can't see one, but there's the phone number of a taxi vice stuck in the booth."

"Call a cab," urged Palfrey. "Make sure the ambulance es to the local hospital, then call me again from there, ll you?"

"Yes," Hamilton said. "See you."

He rang off swiftly.

Palfrey stood very still for a few seconds, then patted e few strands of hair into place; they made a child-like rl which gave him an almost cherubic look, but there s nothing cherubic about his expression or the speed th which he moved and gave instructions. Within ten nutes, two Z5 doctors, both specialists on narcotic ugs, were on their way to the hospital. Within fifteen nutes, agents were beginning to track down all of orro's known friends and associates, a third group was its way to the prison.

By two o'clock in the morning, Palfrey knew that orro had died from morphia inhaled through a ciga- tte: and the only cigarettes he was likely to have noked were those given to him by the prison authori- es; it was unthinkable that he would accept a cigarette om a stranger. Deeply preoccupied, puzzled and wor- ed, Palfrey went to bed a little before three o'clock, yet as up and alert before seven. He made his own tea, anned the newspapers, which had no news of any sig- ficance, and turned the radio on for the seven o'clock ews. There had been a rail crash, an air-liner crash and big fire in Merseyside. He was brooding over the death Morro, and the almost sinister aspect of it, when he ard the radio announcer change the subject but not his ne.

"Eustace Morro, serving a sentence of five years' im-

prisonment for burglary, escaped from West London Prison late last night. Morro, aged forty-one, a self-confessed thief, was found dead in a first class compartment of a train at Woking two hours after his escape. The police say that there is reason to suspect foul play."

Palfrey had given no instructions for the second part of the story to be released. He was sure that Hamilton would not have identified the dead passenger to anyone. Just as someone had known in advance that Morro was going to be released, so someone had known where he had been going and exactly what had happened to him.

"The most un-secret service I've ever heard of," Joe Graven had said.

"But I've never known anything as un-secret as this," Palfrey said in undertones. Then he added explosively: "It's frightening!"

Until a few hours ago, he had been vaguely apprehensive because of the calm. Now, apprehension grew into anxiety. He could not even begin to understand what had happened, and did not want to believe the obvious truth: someone in high authority at the prison or—and more likely—at the Foreign Office or the Home Office, had engineered the murder, and must be involved.

But—why?

One obvious reason had to be considered; that Morro had learned more from Mrs. Harvey-Lee than he himself had known. Every agent put on to Dioll had died. It was as terrifying as it was mysterious, but there must be a simple explanation. Someone must be informing Dioll.

That meant someone in Z5. He would have to check, and check soon, but to probe such a leakage without disclosing his suspicions would be very difficult.

Palfrey's train of thought changed. It would *have* to be done, no matter how difficult.

If anyone attached to Z5 was informing Dioll, then it would be someone with a mind trained in espionage—

nd he, Palfrey, must be under surveillance. So, he must ow do the obvious and espected thing: he must include Mrs. Harvey-Lee in his investigations. To ignore her ould virtually prove that he did not want to arouse her uspicions. No one would be surprised if he tried to learn ore about her through, for instance, Sir Joseph—or Mr. ustice—Graven.

He bathed, shaved, breakfasted, checked that there as no more news about Morro, then put a call through Graven's flat in Albany.

"Sap, my dear chap . . . Yes, of course I'll be glad to e you . . . If it's urgent it will have to be right away, I ave to be in court in less than an hour . . . You'll come ere? . . . Splendid, glad to see you."

At least he sounded in good spirits.

Palfrey took a taxi although he was going only half-a-ile or so along Piccadilly, got off at the entrance to that emarkable colony of homes which lay just off Piccadilly self, stepped into that curious blend of Edwardian harm and Georgian elegance, and was shown to Joe Graven's flat. Almost as soon as he rang the bell he heard risk footsteps, and a moment later the door opened.

Palfrey stood stock still: dumbfounded.

For the man who opened the door was not the Graven whom he had seen two months before, grotesquely over-weight, but the Graven he had known thirty years ago, at Cambridge—stocky, thick-set, but without an ounce of spare flesh.

# 3

# METAMORPHOSIS

It couldn't be Joe Graven, thought Palfrey, still shocked.

It *was* Joe, standing solid as a rock, not fat but almost square, those broad, thick shoulders looking much bigger now that a fleshy neck and jowl and paunch did not take away from their predominance. He was half-smiling, too, the old—the *young*—Joe Graven, with a slightly sardonic, even droll expression.

He chuckled, and destroyed still more of the recollection of fatness. Two months ago, even his breathing had been shallow and his voice wheezy; now it was as deep and strong as it had been all those years ago.

"Come in, come in!" He stood aside. "Believe it or not, there's room to pass." Palfrey went into the white-painted hall, with a mirror along one wall and two dark portraits in oils opposite. "You see before you a worker of miracles."

"I do indeed. Congratulations." Palfrey passed Graven into a small, pleasant room, where bacon and eggs, kidneys and sausages sizzled faintly on a hot-plate, coffee bubbled in a show-through percolator, sliced bread stood by a pop-up toaster.

"I had a telephone call from a man who told me that I could get my weight down in four weeks without reducing my intake of food. Which, as you know, is considerable."

"Most impressive," Palfrey said. "And it worked."

"My dear chap! Here is the evidence of your own eyes. Haven't had breakfast, have you?"

"Not to say breakfast," said Palfrey.

Then set to!" Graven had all his old energy back, and suppleness and grace of movement were much more evidence. His still dark hair had come into its own, his e eyes were bright and clear, his complexion healthy—fact, almost glowing. There was none of the bagginess jowl, eyes and mouth which usually showed on a fat n who had dieted too stringently, and if time were y criterion, Graven's loss of weight had been abnorally rapid. He stood alongside Palfrey and piled food to a large plate, Palfrey himself feeling quite unable face food in such quantity. They sat down at a gateged table, beautifully polished and with good clearce for their legs. On one side were several newspapers, d on top was one with the headline about Morro. Help yourself to coffee," Graven urged. "Well, what's ur problem?" He gave a sudden, unexpected grin: anher familiar characteristic from the past. "That poor evil, Morro?"

"Yes," Palfrey said.

"He was an adventurer to the end."

"I doubt if he enjoyed his last adventure much."

"No, he wouldn't. How did he die?"

"Poison, drawn through a cigarette."

"Got your man yet?" inquired Graven.

"No," Palfrey answered. "Haven't really made a start."

Graven began to eat with his customary dedication, nd went on with almost aggressive jocularity:

"Well, I can't deal with him until you have!"

"Certainly you can't," Palfrey agreed. "But you can ve me some information about Morro's trial and the itnesses involved. I could get everything from the .P.P's* office, but I wouldn't see more than the black nd white on the paper. And you"—Palfrey paused, nowing that the old Graven would always rise to a mpliment and making sure this one was fully apprecied—"keep your eyes open and notice more than any

* Director of Public Prosecutions.

man I know—unless you've changed a lot in more ways than your weight."

Graven also paused, a laden fork half-way to his mouth.

"The same old Sap! I don't think I've lost any mental agility from taking *Dio,* and my memory is as good as ever. Only real reason I was ever elevated to the Queen's Bench," Graven went on with devastating honesty. "I can remember the evidence and what goes on at a trial almost word for word and scene by scene. Remember how I used to hold inquests after every game?"

"I do indeed."

"Still do," Graven told him. "As of this moment I am recalling the Morro case. It lasted three days; would have been four if the jury hadn't made up its mind so quickly. Remember I told you it would?"

"Yes."

"So I can't tell you everything in half an hour."

"Can you tell me all you remember of the character and attitude of the woman who, though Morro's mistress, remained faithful to her husband's goods and chattels?"

Graven began to smile: knowingly, irritatingly. He had always given the impression that he was highly intrigued by the sins of the flesh of others. He had never married, and as far as Palfrey knew, had few if any *affaires;* but he was certainly not homosexual.

"The woman in the case, eh? A *very* beautiful woman —I told you before. Mercia Harvey-Lee, Mrs. Victor Harvey-Lee. I've never met him but I can tell you that her husband is a civil engineer who spends a lot of his time abroad; she, meanwhile, consoling herself with others besides Morro. My impression of the woman is that she and her husband are very civilised over this, she was quite prepared to give evidence and to admit her relationship with Morro. The husband was not in court—he was said to be in Australia—but I'm told that she had no

ar of his reaction when he learned what had happened. *ery* civilised, don't you think?"

"Very," agreed Palfrey, drily. "Who is your informant?"

"The inquiry agent who works for the firm of solicitors who briefed counsel for Morro."

"Do you know if Harvey-Lee has travelled much apart rom to and from Australia?"

"All I know is that he is said to be a consultant on heir Snowy River scheme. His special subject is drilling hrough rock, for road, rail and waterways. I was in-rigued by the attitude of the man and his wife, and ound out everything I could, but it was all hearsay—no ne seeming to know the man. What is your interest, ap?"

"I want to know why Morro was murdered," Palfrey aid simply. "This mysterious husband could have a mo-ive, even if he put a good face on the situation out-wardly."

Graven looked very thoughtful.

"I see what you mean. I can't be certain, of course, but would think it very doubtful indeed. You've got to find nother motive." Graven smiled, almost fiercely. "You've lways been interested in Morro, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"So that encounter of ours wasn't simply chance."

"If we hadn't met in the street I would have come into your court," Palfrey admitted.

"I must watch myself," Graven said. "Do you view him as an agent or as a suspect?"

Palfrey didn't answer.

"Discretion, discretion," jeered Graven. "Presumably you think his ex-mistress may know something?"

"The best of us talk in our sleep," Palfrey remarked.

"Yes. Well—I wish you luck. But be careful! The woman might be a witch."

Graven got up, helped himself to some more bacon

and popped another slice of bread into the toaster. Palfrey was still amazed by the change in him, not only by the loss of weight but by his renewed vitality and aggressive energy.

"Did you go through the usual pangs?" he asked, as Graven sat down.

"Pangs? Oh, when getting the surplus off. No, not a bit. Just started taking these *Dio* tablets and the weight began to melt away and muscle and sinew came in its place. Quite remarkable stuff, Sap."

"I can see. Why don't more people use it?"

Graven looked at him oddly.

"Not everyone can afford it, my boy."

"It can't be as expensive as that."

"Oh, yes, it can be and it is," the Judge informed him. "I'm told it's very scarce, but that may be an induced artificial scarcity. It may be very difficult and expensive to manufacture, of course, I simply don't know. I had it analysed by a firm of pharmaceutical chemists, who said it had a ninety-six per cent calcium base, vitamins A, B and C, and a substance they couldn't specify. I'm told it comes from bees."

"Do you have their analysis?" asked Palfrey quickly.

"No—I scrapped it after I proved it worked. It cost me five thousand pounds," he added, casually.

*"What?"* gasped Palfrey.

"Thought that would make you jump. Five hundred pounds in advance, the balance when I was satisfied with the results. And I really am satisfied! Ten days ago I had a rigorous medical examination for a five-figure endowment assurance. I am a hundred per cent fit man—the cardiograph of my heart shows it to be much healthier than it was when I was last examined. Blood pressure normal, where it was devilish high. I had some diabetes, due to weight, but it's gone completely. Once I got the insurance acceptance, I paid for the balance for the *Dio*."

"Who did you actually buy it from?" asked Palfrey.

"Well, the saleswoman—if you can call her that—telephoned me after I'd told the man that I was interested. I asked her to come round to see me. Remarkable young person." Graven, for once, had been impressed. "Very remarkable."

"Beautiful?" asked Palfrey drily.

"Good God, no! She had a nice complexion and what I believe is called a wow of a figure, but plain as a plate. She brought the pills, I paid the five hundred deposit. When she telephoned again four weeks later, I told her to come and collect the rest."

"Fascinating," said Palfrey, and he thought of Dioll's homely daughter. "But how many people could afford money like that?"

"More than you might think," said Graven. "*I've* introduced Ida to at least seven—you know I'm a member of the Gourmets Club, don't you?"

"I would take it for granted," said Palfrey. "Ida?" The name couldn't be coincidental, surely.

"The girl—Ida Smith," answered Graven. "Have *you* any fat friends, Sap?"

"Three or four," answered Palfrey. "But they're not millionaires."

"Even so, they might think it worth it," said Graven. "I would have paid ten times as much to get my figure and fitness back. If you ask me," he went on, still seriously, "*Dio* could be the answer to the problem of making life last longer. I *feel* about thirty—I am, in fact, fifty-one. All the medical reports say that my physical condition is that of a man in his thirties."

Palfrey said slowly: "You could be right!"

"Believe me, I am right," Graven asserted. "Well! Must go, Sap. I know you'll forgive me."

"Of course. But don't forget to let me have Ida Smith's address!"

Graven chuckled.

"I don't even know it," he said. "I give her addresses of

interested friends when she calls or telephones. And don't go making a mystery of that, you professional mystery-monger! If people could approach Ida direct she would be inundated, and only one in a thousand could even begin to pay her prices."

"Yes, I daresay," Palfrey said. "Or one in ten thousand."

"Don't start getting on that high moral horse of yours," protested Graven. "Here's a young woman selling what could be a dangerous drug without any prescription—I know, I know. But when you get to the weight I was, you seize any chance. I know this could be a form of profiteering, too, but I'd rather pay five thousand to have my old figure and strength back, than spend it on some art treasure in the salerooms or on a piece of jewellery for a woman. *Dio's* done the trick, Sap."

He clapped Palfrey on the shoulder with a vigour which proved his point.

"I see," said Palfrey drily. "Who were the chemists you used for the analysis?"

"Elder and Benn, in Wigmore Street," Graven answered. "And if you want to know the firm of solicitors who briefed counsel—"

"I know them," Palfrey said. "Well—thanks, Joe. I won't keep you."

As he went out into Piccadilly, he felt a few flakes of snow on his face. The sky was much darker than when he had entered Albany, and there was already a powdering of snow on the pavements. A too-fat woman climbed wheezily on to a bus. She looked as if she could afford perhaps five shillings for the drug *Dio*. No more.

*Dio*.

He had never heard of it, Dee-o, as Graven had pronounced it, or *Dio*?

Palfrey walked, despite the snow, pondering deeply, and with a shadow hovering—fear that there was indeed

a serious leakage of information at the Headquarters of Z5.

This was the second shock he had received in a few hours, and it was in his nature to examine coincidences closely, for they were often not what they seemed. Was it simply a coincidence, for example, that the woman whom Morro had seduced in his quest for Dioll should have a husband with an unusual degree of tolerance? There was a large question mark in Palfrey's mind. He could send any of a dozen agents to interview Mercia Harvey-Lee, but they would have to pass on all they learned at second hand, and there was little time.

He must see her for himself.

He could make an excuse, of course, but the sensible thing was to go openly and tell her he was inquiring into Morro's death. If she were in any way involved she would know why he was interested; and if she wasn't involved, it would hardly matter what she guessed.

He could go this minute.

He stepped into a shop doorway, put a cigarette to his lips and flicked a lighter. In fact he seldom smoked, but the lighter was a radio receiver and transmitter in direct contact with Z5. He pressed the cap, and it opened. Immediately, Control at Z5 Headquarters answered.

"Z5—identification, please."

"One Z5," Palfrey said.

"Good morning, Dr. Palfrey."

"Good morning. Are there any urgent messages for me?"

"No, sir. Mr. Hamilton is coming at eleven o'clock, that's all."

"Put him off until twelve noon, and telephone Mrs. Harvey-Lee, at an address in Knightsbridge, to say I will be grateful if she can spare me half an hour at half-past ten. Tell her I'm on my way."

"Very good, sir."

"And have the pharmaceutical chemists, Elder and Benn, questioned about the contents of a drug they analysed for Sir Joseph Graven recently."

"Right, sir!"

"Thanks," Palfrey said.

Palfrey switched off and put the lighter back into his pocket and the cigarette into his case. He could at least be sure such routine orders would be carried out. It was snowing much harder, taxis would be difficult to find—he should have told the operator to send him a car. There was still time. He pondered, and as he did so a taxi pulled up to drop two passengers, and he went across.

"Are you free?"

"Okay, sir. Where to?"

"17, Donegal Square, Knightsbridge."

"Just behind Harrods, sir, isn't it?"

Palfrey nodded. Then sitting back with half-closed eyes he began to speculate on the character of the woman he was going to meet.

# 4

# THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Palfrey's first impression was that Mercia Harvey-Lee, though striking to look at, was not beautiful. Perhaps it was the high-bridged nose; perhaps it was the over-arched lips; perhaps it was that her face had a curiously unreal, almost artificial look, and that her complexion was so perfect that her cheeks might have been made of wax. Whatever the reason, instead of being immediately impressed by her beauty, he was slightly—very slightly—repelled.

She was in a long, lovely room, overlooking Donegal Square and a big fenced-in garden, now beautiful in its winter starkness. The snow, covering grass and trees, hedges and bushes with its thin, soft cloak, was falling much more heavily. It made the light itself seem slightly artificial. Perhaps it was that that gave her complexion its ethereal quality. She was standing by the window, half-turned towards him, slightly taller than average, wearing a suit of some kind of tweed or loosely woven material in an expensive shade of yellow. Her hair was as black as Graven's.

"Good morning, Dr. Palfrey."

He approached, smiling diffidently. Although at first sight he was not impressive, at closer quarters he was an exceptionally good-looking man. The impression was spoiled slightly, perhaps, by his chin, which was hardly thrusting. But when he smiled he had great charm; that charm was very evident now.

"It's good of you to see me, Mrs. Harvey-Lee."

"Is there anyone who wouldn't be happy to meet Dr. Palfrey?" she replied.

He laughed, in mild embarrassment.

"I can think of quite a few!"

She laughed in turn, and something of the artificiality faded.

"Do sit down." She had placed comfortable armchairs on either side of a low, beautifully ornate table of Indian —possibly Turkish—mosaic. A quick glance about the room had already shown him that there were precious pieces from many places—including an ikon which was almost certainly Russian, almost as certainly of gold studded with diamonds, emeralds and pearls. In one corner was an open grand piano—she might well have been playing just before his arrival. "Will you have some coffee?"

"No, thank you," he said. "I've only just had breakfast with Mr. Justice Graven."

She started, and grew tense.

"The judge who—" and then she relaxed; her manner was so much more natural than her appearance. "Oh, of course! You've come about Eustace's death."

She said "Eustace" naturally, too, obviously familiar with the use of Morro's first name, and without the slightest embarrassment.

"His murder," Palfrey stated.

"*Was* he murdered?"

"Beyond all doubt."

"Oh, dear," she said. "Poor lamb."

The use of the word "lamb" in those circumstances was so strange and unexpected that Palfrey started in turn. She sat upright, her beautiful legs crossed at the ankles. She wore flat shoes of a darker shade than her suit, her feet surprisingly small for so big a woman.

"Poor man or poor lamb," Palfrey said. "Someone made quite sure he couldn't enjoy his freedom."

"Oh dear," she agreed, and sighed. "He hated being cooped up. I wasn't surprised that he escaped."

"How well did you know him?" Palfrey asked. His right hand was at his forehead, playing with a few strands of hair.

Mercia Harvey-Lee looked momentarily surprised, and then she gave a completely free and easy smile, and her eyes gleamed; they were hazel, not so dark as one might have expected, and very clear.

"Very well indeed," she answered.

"For how long?"

"I suppose, for over six months."

"So you get to know a man really well in six months?" Palfrey asked mildly.

"If you don't, you never get to know him," she replied. "There may be surprises in store, facts you haven't noticed or facets he hasn't revealed before, but the first week of real affection and friendship is really all you need."

"Indeed," said Palfrey, drily.

"Do you mean you disagree, or you disapprove?" Mercia Harvey-Lee asked, and there was laughter in her eyes as well as a touch of malice in her manner.

"Neither," said Palfrey. "Simply surprised that you should think you knew Eustace Morro as well as that."

"I certainly think I did."

"Did he confide in you?"

"Very often and very deeply."

"About his work?"

"About his past life."

"His love-life or his professional life?"

Her smile faded, and she stared at Palfrey for what seemed a long time. He did not look away from her, but did not try to guess what her answer would be. She appeared to be so disarmingly frank, but that could be most skilfully practised deception. It was very quiet in the room.

After a pause she went on: "Both, Dr. Palfrey. He was obviously a lonely man—men who live his kind of life often are. He was also very brave. I had assumed he was honest, too, but he proved not to be. What is your interest?" she added forthrightly.

"To ferret out the bad men who killed him," answered Palfrey.

This time she leaned back and laughed, and for the first time he admitted that to some she would be beautiful. There was fascination about the lift of her head and the shape of her lips when not in repose.

"You can keep secrets too," she said. "I won't ask what bad men."

"Did he tell you whom he was interested in? Give you any idea of what he was planning—if anything?"

"He said that he was resting, that he could start work again whenever he wished, but that he had enough money for his immediate needs," she answered.

"But he didn't, it proved."

"No. He obviously wanted to secure his future by robbing me," she remarked drily.

"He stole only money and jewels, didn't he?"

"And one or two *objects d'art*," she answered. "He was a man of most discerning taste."

"In every way," Palfrey said gallantly. "And you caught him red-handed?"

"Yes. But I'm sure you've read the full reports of the trial," said Mercia.

"I have indeed," admitted Palfrey. "I never quite understood it, though."

"What didn't you understand?"

"Why you forced the issue," Palfrey told her frankly.

"He was my lover, and I thought I could trust him," she retorted. "To rob me and to rob my husband was quite unforgivable. He used his association with me, his knowledge of this apartment, to rob and plunder—it was betrayal, Dr. Palfrey. Betrayal one does not forgive."

"So, he disappointed you," Palfrey remarked.

"He did, very much."

"Doesn't that mean you had not understood him as ell as you thought?" asked Palfrey gently.

She laughed again, although obviously without so uch relish.

"*Touche*. In one way, yes. But all the same—I knew he as a man who rejected all the conventions, he was the ost amoral person I've ever known. He did disappoint e nevertheless and I *was* surprised. I shouldn't have een. One doesn't always see the obvious, Dr. Palfrey."

"No. Were you in love with him?"

She sat upright, drew her legs beneath her, and then id with almost clinical candour:

"I do not take a lover for whom I have no affection."

"I'm sorry," Palfrey murmured.

"I made a mistake with you, too," she went on. "I ould have expected you to know that instinctively."

Palfrey said, smiling faintly: "One doesn't always see ne obvious, Mrs. Harvey-Lee."

This time she laughed with complete and attractive bandon which made her truly beautiful. He was uzzled by her, and by no means sure that she had told im all the truth, but he was beginning to like her very uch indeed. When she had recovered, she asked:

"Why did you want to know whether I was in love ith him? How could it affect you or have any bearing n your inquiries?"

"You might help to find his murderer, if you loved im."

"I—see. Although it was I who sent him to prison."

"I have known parents who love their children very uch send them to prison because they know it's the nly hope for their future."

"I see what you mean," she replied more thoughtfully.

"*Were* you?" Palfrey insisted. "In love enough to want o find his murderer, I mean?"

Very slowly, very hesitantly, she said:

"No, I was not."

"Have you any idea at all who killed him?"

"None."

"Would you lie to save his murderer?" asked Palfrey.

"I suppose what you're really asking is whether my love turned to hate," she said. "No, it didn't. I never hated, I didn't even dislike Eustace: I simply stopped having any real affection for him."

Palfrey didn't speak, just stared at her intently. Without the slightest embarrassment or suggestion of it, she went on speaking at considerable length. He became aware of the attractiveness of her voice and the complete control she had of words. She spoke quite naturally and yet in a way he thought what she said must have been rehearsed.

"You are thinking, of course, that if love and affection can be cut off so abruptly, it cannot have been very deep, and perhaps is not worthy of either word. That is a convention which dies very hard, although I think more and more intelligent people are beginning to reject it. It has been accepted so long that love is an emotion which lasts for a lifetime—or at least for a very long time—that no one dares to deny it is so. It can last, of course. The purest forms of it undoubtedly do, but it is utter nonsense to believe it to be a general rule. The love which leads to marriage very often dies within days or months—nearly always, within years. A man or woman may have been married three or four times, each time being passionately in love—and forget the first, the second, sometimes the third loves. Even love between parents and their children is often short-lived. Certainly understanding between them is, and in most cases they grow apart. When people grow apart, they no longer love, the two terms are incompatible."

She finished on a gentle but firm note, and Palfrey did not immediately respond.

She looked at him soberly, brows drawn together in a questioning frown. He did not know what to say or whether to say anything; he was not even sure that she had finished.

Slowly she moved towards him. He was acutely aware of her nearness, and knew that she meant him to be. Yet this was not simply seductive. She wanted to impress, to persuade, to convince, rather than to seduce. She stood near him, her eyes deeply penetrating.

"I simply cannot believe that a man of your mental calibre can believe differently, Dr. Palfrey. If you open your mind, you must admit that what I say is true."

Without shifting his position, Palfrey said: "There is truth in it. Nothing is wholly true, especially about the emotions."

She looked surprised, pondered, and then said: "There's something in that. What emotions do *you* allow yourself?"

"They aren't allowed by me or anyone," Palfrey replied. "They come—and yes, you're quite right, they often go as quickly."

"You *do* believe what I believe, then. Do you also agree with me that when the heart rules the head, one far too often behaves foolishly?"

"I'll go for that," Palfrey agreed.

"Has it ever occurred to you," Mercia went on, "that if we had a world in which man could control his emotions—not kill them, or repress them, but control them—that all men might have a much happier life?" It was darker again outside and yet there was a strange light, a reflection from the heavily falling snow. It occurred to Palfrey that one of the reasons for the quiet was that car engines were muffled and the sound of tires on the road did not exist at all. "A much happier world," she went on. "May I state a personal example? Please say, if you think it would embarrass you!"

"I'm not easily embarrassed," Palfrey assured her, but

he spoke with too much precision; it was difficult to be as relaxed as he wanted to be.

"I can believe that. My husband and I are extremely good friends, Dr. Palfrey. We were once deeply and passionately in love. Business took him away a great deal, however, and I soon became bored. I am not made to live—or to sleep—alone. He knew that, and I knew it to be true of him. We accept that each will have lovers. We are, nevertheless, very content—very happy—on the few occasions when we are together. Had we allowed the normal, the conventional situation to develop, he would have been jealous and I would have been at best jealous, and more likely resentful or even profligate. We would have had quarrels, there would have been much bitterness leading to divorce with its inevitable distress. Instead, we are thoroughly content."

Palfrey wondered, why is she talking as freely as this?

He said: "If love between two people can be like that, then it must be deeply satisfying."

"It *is* deeply satisfying," she asserted. "We *have* found the secret of happiness, Dr. Palfrey."

"You seem to have found one secret," Palfrey conceded. "Perhaps the secret is different for each of us."

"There must surely be basic similarities," she argued.

"Possibly," Palfrey said dubiously. "Possibly. Have you any children?"

"No. But I have many friends who envy me," she said. "They see the misery of broken homes in the lives of so many. Have you any children, Dr. Palfrey?"

"I had a son," he answered.

"You *had*," she said, suddenly gentle again. "How very sad." Then, her eyes crinkling at the corners, she went on: "You aren't exactly an old man!"

"No," he admitted. "Not old, yet."

She moved a little closer, as if to see him in a better light, and contemplated him for what seemed a long time. Then she drew still closer, and, to his surprise she

held out both her hands; when instinctively he took them, she drew him to his feet, but made no attempt to draw him nearer.

"Do you know the kind of love which lasts longest?" she asked.

"What do you think it is?"

"It is the love of a dream," she answered. "To be in love not with someone who is, but with someone who *was*. When a loved one dies, one's concept of them never changes. One sees them as they used to be. A man of sixty widowed for thirty years will always think of his wife as she was—young and vital and desirable. It never occurs to him that she would have grown old, as he grew old." She tightened her grip on Palfrey's hands, speaking with greater vehemence and undoubted feeling. "How long have you been in love with a dream, Dr. Palfrey?"

# 5

# THE UGLY GIRL

Palfrey, both fascinated and intrigued by the way the woman talked, had no time to put up his defences against the personal approach. He should have been prepared for the last question, but it took him by surprise. She tightened her grip on his hands and now she was drawing him towards her; he could feel the soft pressure against his chest, and no longer doubted that this was a lesson in seduction.

Once he realised that, he was himself again, but there was no point, yet, in enlightening her. So he answered almost in a whisper:

"Nonsense. I'm not in love with a dream, or with—" he broke off deliberately.

"You are in love with a dream," Mercia Harvey-Lee insisted. Close to, like this, her smile did exactly what it had before—turned her face into one of almost unbelievable, vivid beauty. He had never seen eyes nor face more vital and alive; and even though he was now protecting himself against the almost hypnotic appeal she exerted, he was very much aware of it. "How long ago did she die?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You do, Dr. Palfrey, and you're too big a man to lie. You can talk about her and about what happened, I won't betray your confidences, and if you talk it will help rather than harm you. I promise that."

Gruffly, he said: "It's nonsense."

"Was it your wife?" Mercia asked.

"My wife died ten years ago." He breathed a little

faster than normal, not knowing whether it was because he was being forced to think of what he had lost ten years before, or because of the touch of this woman's hands and the glow in her eyes.

*Was* she attempting to exert some kind of hypnotic spell?

"So it was your wife," Mercia said at last. "Was she very beautiful?"

"She—yes, she was indeed."

"Were you happy with her?"

Palfrey said briefly: "I was happy." He freed his hands and the woman made no attempt to stop him. He drew a foot or two away and she did not move. "This is quite absurd."

"It *is* you who are being absurd," said Mercia, and quite without warning, asked: "Have you a mistress?"

"You know, Mrs. Harvey-Lee, my personal affairs really don't concern you."

"Nonsense," Mercia said roundly. "Your personal and emotional affairs concern me and everyone in London, everyone in England—and if I believe half what I hear, everyone in the world."

Palfrey, with no intention of going but simply to force her to talk even more freely, turned towards the door, saying:

"I must go."

She did not speak, and made no attempt to stop him before he reached the door. He was surprised, disappointed and even a little agitated, but he could not turn back unless she gave him an excuse; it would be an admission that he was only pretending and had no intention of leaving. He touched the handle and opened the door, on edge for her to call him back, but she did not. He stepped on to the landing and moved towards the head of the stairs. They were wide and beautifully curved, carpeted in royal blue. This was a Georgian house, which had, possibly, been turned into a

maisonette, for there was almost certainly another apartment on the floor above, approached by a second staircase. There was quality everywhere but no hint of opulence. Palfrey walked slowly, still half-expecting some move which would delay his departure.

A girl stepped out of a doorway at the foot of the stairs.

The movement was too distant to force a collision, but sudden enough to make Palfrey come to a standstill. His first glimpse showed him dark hair swinging freely and an extremely short dress which was both girlish and sophisticated at the same time. She was looking towards the front door, and he did not see her face immediately; she seemed not to be aware of him. But something caught her attention, and she glanced round.

Palfrey saw the plainest face he had ever seen on a young girl.

She had a big nose, wide lips which did not close properly, big teeth with spaces in between. Her forehead was low, her eyebrows jutted. He gripped the banister rail, tried to speak and break the mesmeric onslaught of such ugliness, as he forced a smile.

"Good morning."

She stared at him without the slightest change of expression, and he wondered if she had heard. The contrast between her face and her figure, her superbly attractive figure, was astonishing. Now, she stood absolutely still—and then, very slowly, she, too, smiled.

"Good morning." She had a pleasant voice, mellow and rich. "I'm sorry I startled you."

She was Ida, of course, Ida Dioll who was known as Ida Smith. Dioll—*Diol* Good God, why hadn't he seen that before?

"I was coming too fast," he said, trying to cover his momentary confusion by adding pleasantly: "Is it still snowing?"

"Very heavily," she answered. "I've just been looking, it's very beautiful. Haven't you a coat?"

He shook his head.

"Nor a hat or umbrella?"

"No. Foolish of me, but it hadn't started snowing when I left home this morning."

"We must lend you something," the girl said, and then she looked past him, obviously seeing a movement upstairs. "May I get something out of the cloakroom, Aunt Mercia?"

"Yes, of course, Ida." Smiling down at Palfrey, Mercia Harvey-Lee went on: "Won't you stay and have some coffee after all, Dr. Palfrey? It's very cold outside."

It was her olive branch and his unexpected opportunity. For although the spell upstairs had been broken by the encounter with the girl, he still wanted the older woman to continue what she had been saying.

"Yes—I think perhaps I will change my mind," he said, and started back up the stairs.

She was waiting for him, and now it no longer occurred to Palfrey to doubt her beauty. Perhaps it was due to the contrast between her and the girl, Ida.

Ida . . .

Joe Graven had talked of her vividly enough but even with the warning, Palfrey had not dreamt she would be so ugly. His first, and instinctive, impulse was to be sorry for her; but he could think about that later. Now he had to concentrate on Mercia Harvey-Lee, as he followed her back to the room in which he had first seen her. On the low table between the chairs was coffee in a silver pot, sugar and cream, cups and saucers and a variety of biscuits. Because the snow was falling heavily, making a dark pall as it fell, the room was much darker than before, the daylight so shadowed it was almost ghostly. Yet Mercia did not switch on the lights.

"I'm glad you came back, Dr. Palfrey," she said, sitting down.

He sat down in turn, looking at her levelly.

"I didn't really want to go."

"No," she said. "You wanted to make me call you back. I *do* know men!"

"Some men," he countered, watching her pour out coffee.

"Cream or hot milk?" she asked. "Or black?"

"A little cream, please. No sugar."

He thought a smile flittered across her face, but she made no comment. Ida, he was thinking; Ida Dioll, who sold a hitherto unknown weight-reducing drug, and whose father was involved in private, possibly secret, research. Was it really just a weight-reducing pill? That would be almost ludicrous. Yet what he now knew added to the mystery; instead of clearing his mind he was getting further confused.

He took his cup and she sat back with hers.

"You were saying that personal affairs and emotions affect the lives of others," he said, easily. "Especially mine."

"And they do. You must be fully aware of it." When he didn't respond, she went on: "If you wake in a bad temper, even with a headache, it can affect how you talk to others, how you do what you have to do, how you think. If you're angry, you're most likely to do the wrong thing than if you're calm. If you're happy you're more likely to behave sensibly than if you're distressed. The attitude of one man or a small group of men can affect the lives of millions—but you know this very well. I don't believe you will even attempt to deny it."

"I don't think I will disagree with what you've said so far. But I am not suffering from any acute emotional strain, Mrs. Harvey-Lee. I am in complete control of myself and of my thinking. I'm trained to be."

"No man can be trained to the impossible," she said flatly. "You don't really lead a full life; no celibate ever

does, something is missing from his daily living. You *are* still in love with your wife, aren't you?"

Palfrey said: "If she were alive, I would be."

"Dr. Palfrey," Mercia said, "do one thing for me, at least. When you can, think about what I've said. You aren't—you *can't* be—wholly happy if you live on your own all the time. You need the company of a woman, the love and affection of a woman, to sleep with a woman. Don't deny yourself all those human needs because of a dream. You are far too important a man. You are far too valuable to the world."

Palfrey smiled faintly. All thought of Ida had passed out of his mind; he was concentrating on what Mercia Harvey-Lee was saying, but was no longer fascinated by it. When he had walked out on her he had broken whatever spell she exerted.

"What makes you think I'm of any significance at all?" he asked.

"If I thought this was mock-modesty I would have a very low opinion of you indeed," she said. "I'm going to assume that you are simply trying to make me talk. I've nothing to hide from you, Dr. Palfrey. My husband has interests in many countries and has a great deal of knowledge about secret service and intelligence work. He has the highest opinion of you. I remember during the time when the world's forests were endangered, he said that we would probably have been entirely denuded of trees but for you.* And his business and his interests are international—like your reputation." She paused for a moment and then went on, smiling: "Was Eustace Morro working for you?"

"Yes," Palfrey answered.

"And you came here simply to find out if I had any idea who might have killed him?"

"Who might have reason to want to kill him," Palfrey

* *The Blight*—a Dr. Palfrey story.

said. "I don't see how you could possibly know who the actual murderer was."

"I'm glad you realise that," she said. "No, I have no idea."

"You are sure that he never mentioned that he worked for me?"

"He did not mention you."

"Not even in his sleep?"

"Not even in his sleep," Mercia assured him without the slightest hesitation. "What do you think happened on the train, Dr. Palfrey?"

Palfrey hesitated, finished his coffee and allowed her to take his cup for more. She poured out, her pale, well-shaped hand as steady as his own, very firm on the handle. He had to mislead her, had to make sure he had given her no reason to suspect the truth.

"I think someone engineered his escape, with the intention of murdering him," he told her. "The most likely reason is that he had discovered something which his murderers did not want him to pass on."

He sipped again.

"And it sprang to your mind that he could have told his mistress about you! He could have learned something from me that I or my husband didn't want him to be able to tell anyone else. So we are suspect on two counts!"

"Yes," Palfrey said simply.

She laughed.

"I could get along with you very well! Do you still suspect me?"

Palfrey's smile broadened.

"Certainly," he said. "But that won't matter if you're innocent. I really must be going!" He stood up, briskly. "Do you think your niece will have found something to protect me from the elements?"

"I'm sure she will have."

"Splendid! And thank you for the coffee and for your forthrightness."

"You will always find me forthright," she assured him. "I live in today's world all the time, Dr. Palfrey."

"You might find dream worlds even more attractive," Palfrey retorted.

They shook hands, her grip as firm as his.

He ran lightly downstairs, and again the girl appeared suddenly, surely not by accident a second time. He was inclined to think that accident had played no part in either; the first appearance simply being Mercia Harvey-Lee's way of halting him. Ida now carried a heavy raincoat, a hat and an unbrella. She smiled at him, but he was glad to be able to avoid looking at her directly as she helped him on with the coat.

"I'll take the umbrella," he said. "Not the hat. Thank you very much."

"I'm glad we had them handy," she said. "I looked for overshoes but there's nothing, I'm afraid. Goodbye."

She opened the door, and he went out.

He stood in the porch, astounded at the transformation. Everywhere and everything was white, there must be at least two inches of snow on the ground, on trees and on bushes. Parked cars were covered, some of them showing only in outline. Cars left more recently had only a thin covering on the windscreens. Two taxis and a Bentley passed, their engines muffled to the point of soundlessness. Somewhere on the other side of the Square there was a clanking of chains, in the garden children were already running about, gathering and hurling snowballs. Few people were in sight, and most of them hidden beneath umbrellas. Palfrey unfurled his own, and turned towards Knightsbridge. Again he realised that he should have sent for a car, but he was content to walk and think.

The cold air was clean and exhilarating, there was always a touch of excitement about the first heavy snowfall of the winter, and this, although late in the season, looked as if it were going to be very heavy indeed. Most

shops and some cars had their lights on. A few newspaper placards screamed: "Escaped Prisoner Murdered", and shivering newsboys stood by the early editions of the evening papers.

Palfrey found himself studying people's size: two men, fatter than average, were standing at the curb, waving vainly at passing taxis. A stout woman stood, hesitating, outside a delicatessen and cake shop.

Palfrey walked on, still teased by something he could not understand—something in the back of his mind that he could not recall. The snow was drifting under a light wind, in places already ankle deep. At the junction with Kensington Road, men were at work throwing grit from two small lorries. All traffic moved at a crawling pace.

Palfrey crossed at the lights, reached the pavement outside the Hyde Park Hotel, going over everything which had been said, seeing both lovely Mercia and the ugly Ida in his mind's eye. The thing he had missed seemed obvious, now; Mercia Harvey-Lee had been prepared to talk as she had, must have known of Drusilla and guessed at his loneliness.

Who would have told her?

He had a strange impression—that she had summoned him, rather than simply agreed to see him.

Palfrey stood stock still—startled, even shocked by the idea. A man, just behind him, also stopped, then drew alongside.

"Dr. Palfrey," he said softly into Palfrey's ear, "it would be just as easy to kill you as it was to kill Morro."

# 6

# THE THREAT

Palfrey felt a slight pressure at his side, from hand, knife or gun, and felt the warmth of a man's breath on his cheek. The man was shorter than he, and had no difficulty in ducking beneath the borrowed umbrella.

Palfrey began to move forward.

"I daresay you're right," he said. "What good would it do you?"

"It could stop you meddling."

"But it's my business to meddle," Palfrey reasoned, and—still walking—looked round. A smooth face, fresh, boyish, was very close to his.

"That's what I mean," the man said. "It's time you went out of business.

Palfrey said: "Oh, don't be silly."

He raised the umbrella high, and strode on.

It was quite possible that the other would shoot, but he did not really think it likely. A shot would be heard, the man could not run fast in the snow or get away quickly in a car, so he had little or no chance to escape. Had he wanted to kill, he wouldn't have chosen this way, either. A bullet from a passing car, from a window above a shop, a car out of control—these were only some of the ways it could be done. His feet slipped a little under him but he did not want to go too fast, nor did he want to look behind to see if he were followed. There was another thought in his mind; a frightening one. He should be followed by agents of Z5; they should not allow anything like this to happen without being at hand.

A man stepped out of a shop doorway, right in front of

him. Palfrey jolted to a standstill and then dodged to one side, expecting the other to do the same. He stood firm, however, and gripped Palfrey's arm—the arm holding the umbrella.

"Dr. Palfrey," he said softly, looking straight into Palfrey's eyes, "it would be just as easy to kill you as it was to kill Morro."

"No doubt," Palfrey said. "Why don't you?" But his heart was thumping much more and he had never felt more alone.

At least the man was startled into silence. He had the same air of youth and good health that Palfrey's first accoster had had, though this man was older. They were both now standing still.

Palfrey moved very quickly to one side, and walked on. Again he knew there was a possibility that he would be attacked but he thought it even less likely. There might, of course, be another attempt to frighten him, although he was now almost at the outskirts of Hyde Park, and beyond the shops; no one could spring out through the railings. They could, however, jump over the top! He glanced along, but all he could see was the falling flakes and little heaps of snow on the top of each upright post. He did not look around, but lengthened his stride—and then he became aware of a car, slowing up alongside. Now his heart began to beat uncomfortably fast, for this was one of the obvious places from which an attack might come.

The driver wound down the window.

"Get in, sir!" he called.

Palfrey saw a youngish man, a Jamaican, whom he knew well as one of the chauffeur agents of Z5. Beaming with deep relief, he stepped cautiously through snow which passing cars had churned to semi-slush, and into the back of the car. As far as he could see, no one was taking any particular interest in him from the sidewalk.

nd his own fears of betrayal by Z5 had been ground-
ss.

"Thanks," he said. "Who gave you instructions?"

"Miss Morgan, sir. She knew where you were going
d told two of us to park near and keep an eye open."

"Good," Palfrey said. "I take it I was watched all the
ne."

"Closely, sir—and the two men who accosted you are
ing followed."

"Good," said Palfrey again. "Take me to the Elite, will
u?"

"At once, sir."

Palfrey brushed the melting snow off the ends of his
users, then sat back and closed his eyes. The main
rpose of the threats had obviously been to alarm him,
t Morro *had* died, and the men had told the truth: it
uld be easy to kill him.

Not, perhaps, as easy as they thought.

But if they knew as much as they appeared to about
, they must also realise that wherever he went he was
llowed by agents; that any threat to him would be ob-
rved on the instant; that they themselves had almost
rtainly been covered from the moment they had ac-
sted him. They could have shot him, but they would
ver have got away. There were all the signs of an
professional attempt to frighten; they would surely
t have allowed themselves to be seen had they realised
ey would be followed. Unless—unless it had been
one deliberately to show him how sure they were of
emselves.

Whatever the truth, he should have news of them
on.

Meanwhile, he had to concentrate on the "coinci-
nces", and there were many more than he liked. By the
me he got to the hotel he was quite sure what he
anted to do at once, and at once meant before he had

changed his shoes and socks, although they were we through. He was soon lost in a crowded foyer, went to lift and was in his office within three minutes of steppin into the hotel. Almost as soon as he entered, Joyce cam in.

She was carrying a pair of socks and some house shoes.

Palfrey smiled appreciatively.

"Mothering me?"

"You really shouldn't walk about in snow like this," sh reproved. "If you catch cold it might put you out of ac tion for days, and it could turn to something mor serious."

"Such as pneumonia! Yes." He sat down and waved her away as she approached, obviously to take his we shoes off. "I'll do this, you take some instructions. I wan an immediate and comprehensive report on any men i any position of authority—political, civil service, indus try, military, intelligence or the professions—who have been heavily overweight and have lost weight very quickly—say over a period of four or five weeks—during the last six months."

Joyce, writing, looked up in surprise.

She was dark-haired and pleasant; some would say she had beauty. She had clear, grey-blue eyes, wore very lit tle make-up, and had a rather sharp manner. She had worked for him for years and had always been in love with him, but from the time she had realised he did not feel the same towards her, she had guarded her emo tions. She remained, however, utterly devoted; and he knew there was nothing she would not do for him.

He thought more deliberately of Mercia Harvey-Le as he went on:

"Then I want a team to start work immediately on closer check on Mercia Harvey-Lee, her often absen husband and all the family."

oyce stopped writing. "Do you think this Mercia rvey-Lee could be deeply involved?"

It wouldn't surprise me at all," said Palfrey. "Any rd from the chemists, Elder and Benn?"

Yes," answered Joyce. "We've a copy of the analysis he tablets." She took it from his desk and read: "Cal- m base—ninety-six per cent, vitamins, A, B and C— e and a quarter per cent, substance of unknown na- —three-quarter per cent." She looked up. "I've had a neral request put out through the police to find out if other chemists have analysed a similar pill."

Good girl!"

Is that all?" Joyce asked.

The request for information about men who have lost ght needs to be world-wide."

Of course," she said. "I'll send it out at once. Do you nt to see the wording?"

Leave it to you," said Palfrey. Everything was so nor- l that his fears had eased.

He wriggled his toes, which were beginning to glow, d rubbed his feet with the towel. Joyce went out as he gan to draw on dry socks. He moved across to the win- w which looked on to an artificial garden of lawns, dges and rose bushes, thought of the weather above, ved again and switched on a television set. Every ap- ach to the hotel, every possible way of reaching Z5's adquarters, was covered by television twenty-four urs of every day. He saw the narrow street which led m Piccadilly, the thickening carpet of snow, the al- st empty street.

A strange and, for him, rare thought flashed through mind.

How long would he have to live this simulated life— oking out on to a garden glowing with artificial light, owing that at any moment he might be killed? That as how he *did* live, whether he thought about it or not.

And that, whatever Mercia Harvey-Lee said, was why h could never settle permanently with any woman. It we bad enough to endure such a life as a bachelor; marriec it would be impossible.

He went across to his desk and pressed a bell; almos immediately Joyce's voice sounded through a speaker o the desk.

"Yes, Sap?"

"When those instructions have gone out, I'd like tw men to go through the British heavyweight V.I.P.s and t let me have a list at once."

"Yes."

"And I want an inquiry—very secret—among top leve manufacturing pharmaceutical chemists about a weight reducing drug called *Dio*—D-I-O."

"The first three letters of Diol!" Joyce exclaimed.

"That's right."

"Sap," said Joyce, "we're getting somewhere at last. When he made no comment she went on: "Is this all fo now?"

"Yes," Palfrey said. "Oh—is Hamilton here?"

"Yes."

"I'll see him right away," said Palfrey.

Two minutes later, Hamilton came into the office.

That was about the moment that the first replies to the inquiries about fat men at the head of their professions or holding positions of importance in any calling, reached Z5 agents. Oddly, the first arrived in special code from Japan, where three was a high-frequency radio receive and transmitter in a temple not far from the ancient city of Kyoto. A priest, resplendent in vermilion gown, re ceived the message and acknowledged it, then began to compile his list: immediately, he put down the names o certain over-weight Shinto and Buddhist priests. Next, he put down some of the most renowned boxers in Japan men notorious for their size as well as for their muscle and began to check where one had lost weight.

In Washington, a man in the Pentagon and another in e White House began to carry out the Z5 order—and did a curator at the National Museum; these were ree of a hundred and twenty-seven men in the United tes who began to compile lists.

There were over fifty in Australia, working throughout ery State and the Northern Territories.

In Finland, Norway and Sweden, where snow and ice pped cities and countryside alike, agents took the ssages and began to work. In Peking, seven men gan; in France and Germany, Switzerland and Italy, in ery country in Europe and in South America, in e Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East, d in the newly emergent countries of the heart of the ntinent, agents of Z5 began to do what Palfrey had in-ucted them to do.

Others did, also, in South Africa, in India and Paki-n . . . in every nation of the world and every major y the names and addresses of fat men in every mmunity who had recently lost weight, were put down paper.

The inquiry began in Moscow, also.

And in Moscow, which lay under a six-inch blanket of zen snow, the man who directed the operations was old and close friend of Palfrey: Stefan Andromovitch.

Andromovitch was a huge man, and if ever he should n to fat he would be enormous, but he was lean and uscular, and remarkably strong; indeed in every way a markable man. His size could strike terror into the arts of those who enraged him, but in repose his face, ith the big, regular features, was the face of a saint. He d offices beneath the Kremlin, and he was not only al-wed but expected to receive messages from Palfrey hich no one else in the Kremlin, or in all Russia, under-od.

It was a simple fact that the nations of the world,

without exception, trusted Palfrey and Z5, and all who worked for them.

It was another simple fact that by the time Palfrey had finished talking to Hamilton the lists were being compiled in every country in the world.

Hamilton looked old for his years—a man in his late twenties who would have passed for forty anywhere. He had a lined face and thinning hair, and his manner was one of almost constant surprise and anxiety. Even as he sat looking at Palfrey across the big, flat-topped desk, he wore the same expression of harassment.

"No," he was saying. "I've not discovered anything else at all. I've checked with every man you put on the case last night, and you can be positive about three things. Morro didn't buy any cigarettes and he wasn't given any *en route* to Waterloo or on the train. I have personally talked to the bus conductor, ticket collector, taxi driver, reporter . . ." he tapped a folder which lay on Palfrey's desk. "It's all in there. No outside person could have given Morro those drugged cigarettes, sir. They must have been among the things given to him when he left the prison."

Palfrey said, gruffly: "It certainly does seem like a prison job."

"There really isn't much doubt, sir."

"All right," said Palfrey. "Then we'll accept it as a fact, an ugly fact. Someone in the prison service or who has access to the prison—" he broke off.

"I can go and see the prison governor."

"Isn't he a namesake of yours?" Palfrey asked.

"Yes—no relation, though."

"I'll see him," Palfrey decided. "How about the identification?"

"One of the porters at the Woking hospital recognised him as Morro," Hamilton replied. "He remembered his photograph in the papers at the trial. Once his identity

as known, there was no way of keeping it from the ess—so I filched his Diners' Club Card and the fake ssport."

"Nice work," approved Palfrey. "Have you a copy of e post mortem report?"

Hamilton tapped the file again.

"In there."

"What about the things in Morro's pockets?"

"I've made a list. They're at the local police station—cept these few," Hamilton added, taking a packet of garettes from his pocket. It was a popular brand, sold the million every day, and it looked new although ushed a little at one corner. He handed it across to Paley, open at one end; Palfrey counted fifteen cigarettes.

"If he was given a full packet of twenty at the prison, parently he smoked four without harm and the fifth lled him. Got the butt of the last cigarette?"

Hamilton dipped into his pocket again and brought t a small plastic bag, in which was the discoloured end a cigarette and some loose shreds of tobacco. Attached this was a small label, and written on the label were e words: *Highly toxic. Impregnated with a morphia xtract of maximum penetration. See File* 470X12.

"The analyst's report is in the file with photographs," id Hamilton.

"Right, thanks." Palfrey smiled faintly. "Tired yet?"

"I could do with a nap, but if—"

"Have your rest," Palfrey interrupted. "But when ou're on the move again, check over everything to find ut if any fat men—or better still, ex-fat men—are volved."

Hamilton's brow became even more corrugated than ver; like a bloodhound's.

"If I know you, that's a key question," he remarked. One springs to mind almost at once, sir."

"Really? Who?"

"My namesake," Hamilton said. "I've met him several

times and he used to weigh twenty stone if he weighed a pound. He was in a photograph this morning—one the *Globe* used—with half a dozen other people. He can't be more than twelve stone now." Hamilton studied the expression on Palfrey's face, and then asked faintly: "Have I dropped a brick, sir?"

"No," said Palfrey crisply. "No. Very much to the contrary. All right, Jim. Thanks."

Hamilton got up and went out.

Palfrey pressed the buzzer for Joyce, and asked her to make an appointment with the Governor of West London Prison.

# 7

# THE GOVERNOR

The Governor, Colonel James Hamilton, M.C., O.B.E., looked fighting fit. Palfrey saw in him something which put him in mind of Graven. He was the same age, had the same directness of gaze, the same briskness, and he seemed to be in exactly the same rejuvenated state of health. The tone of his skin, too—that of a man who spent much of his time out of doors—reminded him forcibly of Graven's. His voice, however, lacked Graven's rather sardonic tone.

"Sit down, Palfrey . . . Pleasure to meet you in person . . . We were once at the same garden party at the Palace, I believe—caught a glimpse of you then . . . You wouldn't know me." There was a scarcely perceptible pause before a switch of subject. "You've come about that bad business of last night, of course. Must have been a leak . . . Difficult to trust anybody these days."

He stopped, abruptly.

"Have you any idea where the leak was?" asked Palfrey.

"My dear fellow. Must have been on your side. Or the Home Office's. Or possibly at the Foreign Office, although they wouldn't have known the details, simply put the order through. Very poor show."

"Yes, indeed," said Palfrey. "I'd like to talk to the warder who was attacked."

"Who? Oh—*my* man. Afraid it's not possible, Palfrey."

Palfrey, already exasperated and near to anger, said in his mildest voice:

"It must be made possible."

"Then you'll have to do it," said Colonel Hamilton blandly. "I was asked to make quite certain that he could not be interrogated or approached by newspapers, bribed or persuaded to talk in any way. And I made sure. I gave him facilities to escape, and have refused the Press any information about him, simply said I won't allow him to be interviewed. He lived outside the prison. I sent him home—and he slipped away. He left just after ten o'clock and is somewhere on the Continent by now."

"Oh," said Palfrey, and his right hand strayed to his hair. "You've no idea where?"

"None at all. I wanted him out of everyone's way."

"Didn't you think it would look suspicious?"

"Don't care a damn what it looks like," said Hamilton bluffly. "You wanted it hushed up, and it's hushed up. Bound to be a bit of fuss at first, but there's no need to make a meal of it."

"No," murmured Palfrey. "I suppose not. What attitude are you adopting with the Home Office?"

"Blaming them," said the Governor promptly. "*They* gave the instructions, when all's said and done. I don't see what's worrying you about this, Palfrey. I know you lost a man, but there are other fish in the sea. Shows you're up against someone pretty clever, though."

Palfrey freed his forefinger and pressed the fine strands of hair against his forehead, making a circle.

"Yes, indeed," he agreed. "Will you let me know if your man returns?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"If he comes back, I want to know immediately," said Palfrey very clearly. "What is his name?"

"Fry. Jonathan Fry. Widower, no children, lives alone, dedicated to the prison service, ex-soldier, knows how to keep his mouth shut and knows how to obey orders. You needn't worry about Fry, Palfrey. There won't be any leak from him or anyone else, from my end."

"I'm sure there won't," Palfrey said.

"If I can help again, let me know," the Governor said briskly. "Now—I've more damned newspapermen to see. You'll forgive me if I have a warder show you out, won't you?"

"Yes, of course," Palfrey said.

He walked in the wake of a tall, powerful warder in the blue grey uniform of the prison, along wide corridors, past men in convict's uniform, past a library, the door of which stood ajar, and then into the first big, grey, gaunt courtyard, with the high, unscalable walls, warders standing at the doors and gate. As they approached the main gate, one of two men on duty there took a heavy bunch of keys from his belt and unlocked a postern door. Palfrey stepped through into a bigger yard, where cars and trucks and a black maria stood. Two men were clearing snow off the cars while warders watched with undisguised vigilance. A small door was opened by one of them, and Palfrey stepped through into freedom.

"Good day, sir," his escort said.

"Good day to you," Palfrey returned vaguely.

His car, with the Jamaican driver, stood near the wide road which led off the main road leading in turn to the prison. Three buses passed, the reflected light from the snow making their scarlet paintwork shine brightly. In the road itself the snow had been melted and cleared but the pavements were still covered. Banks of snow were heaped at the gutters, running with brown water at the edges.

Shepherd's Bush Green looked beautiful in a canopy now frozen on to grass and branches. There was a pale sun, but it was bitterly cold, and Palfrey sat back, watching, seeing the young walking easily and the old with effort—and here and there a fat man or woman moving with obvious clumsiness. He did not consciously think, allowing all that had happened to drift through his mind, while leaving his subconscious to sort out the wheat from the chaff. Slowly, one thing resolved itself.

He disliked Colonel Hamilton very much, and disliked his manner and the assumptions even more. Most of all he disliked the fact that the warder Fry was out of reach.

He took his "lighter" from his pocket, and as soon as the response came, he gave precise instructions.

"Jonathan Fry, a warder at the West London Prison, left the prison just after ten last night and is said to have gone to the Continent. No destination is known. Alert all airports, Channel ports and railway termini to look out for him. Ask the Continental police to co-operate through our agents, and report direct to me if he is traced, but take no action."

A man said: "Very good, sir."

Palfrey flicked the "lighter" off, and sat back again. They were in the Bayswater Road with the houses in their tall terraces on the left, Hyde Park stretching almost out of sight on the right. Even in his present mood Palfrey found the beauty of the park drawing his attention. The sun was stronger here, and the snow crystallised on the bare branches, so that it looked as if some ethereal light came not from the sky but from the trees themselves. Over the undulating land of the park, the snow lay thick and flat, hardly broken except by trees. Here and there a man or woman plodded through, and at a steeper hill than most, a group of children played with an improvised sledge. There was more noise now that the snow had stopped falling, but even so, it was very much less than the normal clatter.

Palfrey left the car at the side entrance to the Elite.

As he walked to a lift he thought again of the prison governor, recalling his own instructions about the search for Fry. He must have sounded as dictatorial as Hamilton. Did he resent in Colonel Hamilton those very habits and attitude which he himself had acquired?

Nonsense!

Hamilton's manner had been arrogant and almost aggressive. He made no concessions at all—the Press, the

public, the Home Secretary and Palfrey could take it or leave it. And if he, Hamilton, came under too much pressure, he would let the whole story come out. It was a kind of blackmail.

Palfrey reached his office.

On the desk was a file marked: Colonel James Hamilton, M.C., O.B.E. He opened it and saw a photograph which made him widen his eyes in astonishment, for here was a picture of an enormous man, as fat in proportion as Joe Graven had been a little over two months ago.

He hardly seemed the same man, and the contrast was heightened by another photograph, placed behind the first, which showed him exactly as he had seemed today: lean, tough, hard-faced, aggressive. Palfrey studied the details of a not particularly outstanding career. There was a personal note which said: According to close associates there has been a noticeable change in his attitude since he lost weight. He spends his week-ends and off-duty periods with a sister, Mrs. Margaret Denham, in Andover, Hampshire.

A change of attitude . . .

Palfrey's telephone buzzed, and he lifted the receiver slowly.

"Mr. Crossman, sir." Crossman was an agent checking on Colonel Hamilton.

"I'll speak to him . . . Hallo, Crossman."

"I've just come from Colonel Hamilton's sister," said Crossman briskly. "There are two things to add to the report. His attitudes and personality seem to have changed since he began to take the reducing drug—a drug he calls *Dio*, according to the sister, sir. And he received supplies from a young woman she knew only as Ida—a very plain or homely person."

"Ah," said Palfrey. "What do you know about Hamilton's means?"

"He appears to be wealthy, sir."

"Right, thanks. Start a comprehensive check on his

movements lately, and report at least twice a day, will you?"

"Very good, sir." Crossman rang off briskly.

Palfrey sat back and reflected on the physical change in Mr. Justice Graven. He had been amiable enough, but his manner had been different, he had seemed much more incisive, almost aggressive, and less amusing—almost as if it had been an effort to crack his jokes. "Must go, Sap. Can't wait here all day"—instead of his usual, laughing, retreat.

Palfrey rang Joyce, who answered at once.

"The two agents who followed me this morning," he said. "Are they back yet?"

"Duros is, yes."

"Send him in, will you?" asked Palfrey, and Joyce rang off without a word.

Palfrey contrasted a mental picture of her with one of Mercia Harvey-Lee. It was the first time since he had left the house in Donegal Square that he had thought more than fleetingly about the woman with whom Morro had been associated, and for a reason which he did not understand, his mind refused to concentrate on what she had said. He smiled faintly, thinking, that can go into my subconscious, too; then there was a tap at the door.

Felix Duros came in.

Duros was one of the least noticeable men Palfrey had ever known, yet among the active agents of Z5 there were probably more ordinary-looking men than in any group. The advantages of agents who could easily get lost in a crowd were obvious, and often this was of greater value than any other quality. On the third floor here were training quarters, where men with no other qualifications were turned into efficient agents. Duros was of mixed Greek, English, French and American blood, a medium-sized man with mousy-coloured hair and nondescript eyes, a suit which fitted reasonably well, black shoes, a dark tie.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Come and sit down and tell me all about it." Palfrey pointed to a chair.

Duros sank bonelessly into it.

"I followed the man who stepped out of the shop doorway," he said. "Smart followed the man who came from behind you. They both went to the same place—a private hotel in Cromwell Road, the Oceanic. They did not appear to suspect that they would be followed. It's one of those hotels which looks like a single house but has spread to several houses on either side. There are over a hundred rooms, most of them occupied by permanent residents. Many have their own cooking facilities and bathroom. About half of them are couples—married couples presumably—and the rest singles. There are three dormitory rooms."

Palfrey did not ask how he had obtained this information but accepted its accuracy without question.

"I don't know whether these two have single rooms," Duros went on. "But they are obviously well known there, and have probably been resident for some time."

"Names?"

"I don't know yet. Smart may—he should be back soon." Duros gave a quirk-like smile. "He is using his sex-appeal on one of the maids, a little Maltese girl."

Palfrey, knowing Smart, wasn't surprised.

"And?" he asked.

"At the back of the hotel, in the next street—Allcott Street—there is a similar set-up for offices and warehouses," Duros reported. "A row of houses which apparently communicate. They belong to the United Pharmaceutical and Manufacturing Chemists Limited. I haven't full details, but from what I could gather from a gas fitter who went in to check a leak, there are a dozen small laboratories and storerooms. They produce indigestion tablets, but one lot of the packaged goods are unnamed—there doesn't seem to be anything printed on

the labels but U.P.M.C., and a number." Duros gave that little smile again. "My gas fitter thinks they're making the pill!"

"Contraceptive?"

"Are there any others?"

Palfrey ignored the quip and said thoughtfully: "I want the names of the owner or manager of the hotel, and the names of the manager or proprietor of the chemists and laboratories." His finger strayed to his forehead. "Not exactly your job. I'll put Jason on to it, to work with you. Select the man or woman you think most worth keeping under surveillance and find out as much as you can about them by this evening. And let me have a report every four hours, starting at eight o'clock tonight."

"Right, sir!" Duros stood up and left immediately.

Palfrey got up and went to a set of blueprint drawers which ran along one side of the big room. In here were maps of the big cities, of countries, of sections of London, New York, Tokyo—all the major metropolitan areas of the world. They were on very thin paper, which was smooth to touch; in each four-inch deep drawer there hundreds of maps. He drew out the London drawer, and found the map of the South Western area, which started at Knightsbridge and spread through the Kensingtons to Fulham, Chelsea and Putney, across the river to Brixton, Lambeth, Clapham, Battersea, Wandsworth and far beyond. He placed the map on a dark surface. The streets and buildings, the squares and terraces of houses, the big stores and the factories, power stations and gasometers now showed up clearly, each one marked with great precision. He found Cromwell Road, and the British European Airways Terminal.

There on the south side of Cromwell Road was the Oceanic Hotel, and behind it, Allcott Street, with United Pharmaceutical marked along a stretch of it. He studied the approach roads, and saw that it would be a matter of

only five minutes to walk from either place to the BEA Terminal, and another few seconds to lose oneself in the crowd there. Although no alleys or service roads ran from the laboratories to the hotel, their back gardens backed on to each other.

"Now I wonder what we've run into," Palfrey mused aloud.

One thing was self-evident: the hotel and the laboratories were well-established. If there was any sinister significance, any form of terrorist organisation for instance, it was without Z5 having the slightest indication or knowledge of it. Both places appeared to be straightforward, commercial undertakings.

It *could* prove a coincidence that the two men had gone to the Oceanic Hotel, but it wasn't likely.

And the possible association with *Dio* was obvious, too.

"The quicker we have a look, the better." He spoke aloud again, already trying to decide how best this could be done. A local authority surveyor, perhaps, or an inspection by the fire service—anything which would seem normal and would not suggest to anyone that it was a special inquiry.

There was a buzz, from Joyce.

"Can you spare me a minute, Sap?"

"Yes, of course," Palfrey said.

Almost at once his door opened and she came in, carrying another of the familiar folders. She was at all times rather earnest, almost solemn, and smiled very little, but now she was smiling with obvious satisfaction. She moved across to him and put the folder down.

Palfrey opened it.

On the top of the papers inside was a photograph of an enormously fat woman, so fat that her features were almost buried in flesh, her eyes, nose and mouth appearing unnaturally small against the pneumatic-tire

effect of her chins. As he studied the photograph, Palfrey felt tension rising within him. Slowly he put it aside and lifted the picture beneath this one.

It was of Mercia Harvey-Lee, as he had seen her this morning. Both photographs were of the same woman.

# 8

# EXODUS

Palfrey looked up into Joyce's clear eyes and saw the satisfaction in them, almost the pleasure.

"Your idea?" he asked.

"I went back four years, Sap!"

"When did she lose weight?" inquired Palfrey.

"Three and a half years ago."

"Was she Mrs. Harvey-Lee then?"

"Oh, yes. They've been married fifteen years."

"What kind of weight problem does the husband have, I wonder."

"It's surprising how little is known about Victor Harvey-Lee. He keeps in the background very much, and I've only found one photograph—a back view, in a crowd! He was tall and lean when that was taken, and very fair haired—or white, even."

"Any connection at all with Professor Dioll?" asked Palfrey.

"We haven't found the slightest."

"Anything new about the girl, Ida?"

"Nothing—except that she's lived with Mrs. Harvey-Lee for about four years. There's very little we've been able to find out about the household," Joyce told him. "The Harvey-Lees have been there all their married life, although even old-established neighbours say they've never seen him, he's away so much. Most of the houses in the square have been converted into flats, and most tenants are new—so there's nothing remarkable about no one knowing him."

"Servants?" asked Palfrey.

"They've been changed recently. None of the old family retainer types are at the Donegal Square house."

"Who is following up the inquiry?" asked Palfrey.

"The Stantons," answered Joyce.

Palfrey said thoughtfully: "Tell them to be very careful. I don't like this one little bit."

"You never like it when you discover something that's been going on under your nose for a long time," said Joyce discerningly. "Sap—" she paused.

"Yes?"

"You couldn't be wishfully thinking, could you?"

"About what?" asked Palfrey, startled.

"You've been almost moping for want of a major challenge lately, you know."

Palfrey stared—and then gave a spontaneous chuckle.

"So when I get the slightest sign of trouble, I put on all possible pressure because I've been bored with nothing to do. Mountain, as it were, out of molehill."

"That's it," said Joyce, and although her eyes smiled, her expression remained sober.

"We'll soon find out," said Palfrey. "Are any reports coming in yet?"

"One or two ribald ones," answered Joyce. "When did we go into the slimming business? Sap, I know you're probably right—"

"Morro *was* murdered," Palfrey pointed out.

"Yes. But your own report said it could have been to keep him quiet about—" she faltered.

Palfrey stood up, rounded the desk and slipped his arm about her shoulders.

"What's really on our mind?" he asked.

She shrugged, yielded towards him, and for a moment put her head against his chest. She was very down, he could tell, and suddenly it occurred to him that something in what he had said to her about Mercia Harvey-Lee had stirred her to a backlash of jealousy. He put his

other arm round her and gave her a hug. She looked up into his face, her expression clearing.

"Bless you!" she exclaimed. "I'm all right, Sap. Sometimes it just seems so silly that we spend so much time together and know each other so well, and yet—" She paused, freed herself and asked in a much more light-hearted voice: "Is she really as beautiful as she looks?"

"In which photograph?" asked Palfrey solemnly; and they laughed as they went across to the map and studied it.

"Will you find out whether any work is being done in or near the Oceanic Hotel—telephones being put in, new gas mains or electrical cables being laid—sewer being examined," Palfrey asked. "I want to get a couple of men in both places quickly. The Factory Acts will give us an excuse in the laboratory."

"I'll fix something," Joyce promised.

As she went out, he reflected that she was a most remarkable woman and in a way he had never thought possible he had come to rely on her. She was attractive, and deeply in love with him—and she would make no conditions, would simply "belong" to him.

He could never "belong" to her in the same way.

Did that really matter? Need it prevent them from living together, for instance? Mercia Harvey-Lee would say that it need not. He shrugged the thought aside, and looked through all the reports he had so far received, made notes on Duros, and wondered when he would hear from Smart.

There was one very reassuring thing; reports were coming in, and although he suspected a leakage from these offices, there was no major crisis yet. He was so uncertain of himself that he had not even told Joyce.

He caught his breath.

He hadn't thought of checking any over-weights here

at H.Q. And Joyce had not sprung to that danger. Mind pictures of the few very heavy agents here were flashing through his mind when the buzzer sounded.

It wasn't Joyce, but an assistant.

"Mr. Goldblatt, of Washington, is on the line, sir."

"Thanks—Hallo, Goldie!" exclaimed Palfrey, a moment later. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, Sap." Goldblatt had a rather hard New England voice which came across three thousand miles very clearly. "What is your latest anxiety about?"

"A weight-reducing drug which seems to alter mental attitudes in some people," Palfrey answered. "So far it's only a preliminary investigation and I can't tell you very much about it."

"The sooner you can tell us more the better," Goldblatt said, and there was no mistaking the ominous ring in his voice. "I can name three who have taken it—all highly placed in Washington. One is in the State Department, one is on the White House staff and one is in the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I happen to know these men personally. There may be a lot of others."

Palfrey was sitting very still.

"What form does their new attitude take?" he asked.

"Intolerance," answered Goldblatt promptly. "Addison, at the White House, has been a moderate liberal in Civil Rights ever since I can remember, and has the ear of the President. At two recent parties he sounded off on a very different line, almost unbelievably racialist. It's worried several people because it could possibly reflect a change of attitude on the President's part. The riots of last summer continued into the fall and winter for the first time. There's some talk that the view is hardening that if the Negroes won't accept what's being done at the present pace, they'll have to be given one or two sharp lessons."

"That doesn't sound at all like the President," Palfrey remarked slowly.

"It isn't—unless Addison is being used as a sounding

board, to test the feeling in the capital. One thing is certain, Sap."

"What is it?"

"A lot of people don't like it."

"They wouldn't," said Palfrey. "What about the other two?"

"The FBI man has let his hair down several times at private parties," Goldblatt told him. "His viewpoint has swung from being a great believer in medical and psychiatric treatment for drug addicts, to the need for simply herding them in jail. Of the three, he's the least rational. The man in the State Department has become extremely fault-finding with his staff and family—no one satisfies him, although he used to be tolerant and understanding. Then, people would work their hands off for him, now he's isolating himself even from his best friends." Goldblatt paused again, as if to let all he had said sink in, and then added: "Have you any reason to believe that it's a cause for anxiety?"

"Not really," Palfrey said. "It depends what comes first."

"I don't understand you."

"If the drug's main purpose is to reduce weight and the change of mood is a side effect, then we needn't worry yet. If the main purpose is to cause the change of mood and the loss of weight is a side effect, then we've plenty to worry about. Apart from any who lose weight —we can trace those fairly easily—we would have to find men who take the drug but don't lose weight because they've none to lose." Palfrey was thinking this out as he went along. "Find out what they've been taking and who's been distributing it. The stuff may be called *Dio*—D—I—O. That's the name it goes by over here."

"I'll do everything I can," promised Goldblatt.

He rang off, leaving Palfrey with the impression that he was very worried indeed. As soon as he had replaced the receiver, Joyce called him.

"Sap, unless we send someone ourselves, without an excuse, we can't go to the Oceanic Hotel or the place in Allcott Street," she said. "The snow has caused chaos in nearly every service, all the gas, electrical and local authority staffs are working overtime as it is, and conditions are expected to get worse tonight. The forecast is for near zero temperatures. Even if we made an excuse, no one would believe us, today."

Palfrey said glumly: "Then we'll have to wait until tomorrow. We'll need to have the place closely watched, though. I'll see to it. Did you monitor Goldblatt?"

"No," Joyce said. "But I was told he'd been through."

"He doesn't think I'm wishfully thinking," Palfrey told her. "Send Keller in, will you?"

"Yes," said Joyce, in a subdued voice.

Palfrey turned on the television again and saw a long line of taxis and private cars in the street, obviously caused by a traffic block in Piccadilly. Umbrellas were up, so it was snowing again; if it did freeze tonight, traffic would be virtually at a standstill. He wished he had an excuse to raid the Oceanic Hotel—everyone was likely to be in on such a night. He was watching when there was a tap at the door, and Keller came in.

Keller, unlike Duros, was a noticeable man, a big, powerful blond, giving just the slightest impression of the animal or primitive. He could be, to Palfrey's certain knowedge, completely ruthless. He had no hesitation about taking life, provided he felt justified in doing so. He would kill, without regret, a man known to be bad, though not unless the killing served an essential purpose. As he entered, Palfrey found himself thinking again of Mercia Harvey-Lee. Here was a man who controlled his emotions without, apparently, any effort at all. He did not need to be in love so as to "belong". In his way of life, in fact, there was something of the attitude which Mercia had shown.

"Hallo, Keller," Palfrey said. "Do you mind getting your feet cold?"

"Hallo, Sap. Not in a good cause."

"Look," said Palfrey, moving towards the map. "I want the Oceanic Hotel and the U.P.M.C. place watched closely all night. Every doorway, every window. If anyone leaves, I want them followed. You can tell the police what we're doing, but we would rather not call on their help yet."

Keller pursed his lips.

"I'll need a lot of men."

"Use as many as you like," said Palfrey. "If there's the slightest indication of a mass exodus from either place, call the police to help stop it, on the grounds that the U.P.M.C. could be a warehouse and manufactory for illicit drugs, and the hotel is being used for immoral purposes."

"I think I ought to warn the Yard, if there's any chance that we might need them," Keller said.

"Handle it as you think best," answered Palfrey. "But I don't want the people from the hotel to get away, and I don't want anything removed from the warehouse. Tomorrow we'll find out what's going on in both places."

Keller nodded. Palfrey noticed how very fair his eyebrows and lashes were, and how thick the hairs on the backs of his hands. Harvey-Lee was a very fair-haired man.

"How soon can you start?" Palfrey asked.

"It will take at least half an hour to get everybody ready, and if the traffic gets any worse, an hour to get over there," answered Keller. "For safety's sake, say two hours."

"Don't make it any longer," Palfrey urged.

An hour earlier a plain van and a Ford car appeared in Allcott Street, and were loaded with small boxes labelled

U.P.M.C. Everyone in the laboratory and the warehouse, storerooms and offices lent a hand in the loading, and a constant stream of small vans and cars followed the first. There was, however, nothing particularly unusual about this: delivery and collection vans called regularly and it was easy to believe that so many were there at the same time because of road conditions. Van after van drove off, but not all went in the same direction. There were eight turnings within two hundred yards of Allcott Street, some leading towards the river and the south, some towards the west, the north, the east.

In the tangle of traffic, the plain vans were easily lost.

At the same time, men and women in a proportion of four to one packed their clothes and their belongings at the Oceanic Hotel. This again was not remarkable in itself; true, more guests left at about the same time than usual, but the police and others who might normally have noticed what was happening were too busy sorting out the hold-ups caused by the snow. Several police reinforcements were sent to the main roads out of London to the south and west, and others to the BEA Terminal. The snow had caused the cancellation of all flights out of London Airport, so traffic moving back from Heathrow to the terminal was thicker than usual.

There was one odd thing.

Would-be guests, stranded in London by the storm, were told by the clerks at the Oceanic Hotel that there were no available rooms. FULL UP signs were at the windows and at the door, to discourage inquiries—and Z5 agent Geoffrey Smart, approaching with Toni, the girl with whom he had spent much of the day, saw this. There was no immediate reason to be surprised.

"You're going to be busy tonight," he said. "Can I come in and help you?"

She was a pretty little thing, not much more than a child.

"Help me is not what you would do," she said. "Some

other day perhaps I see you, but not tonight. I must hurry or I shall be late, and they do not like it when I am late." She hurried in the main entrance, and Smart, intrigued by the child but more by the possibility of adding to his knowledge of the hotel, hovered outside. He had no reason to believe that he was suspected of spying: he did not have the slightest suspicion of danger.

Toni appeared, unexpectedly, at the top of the steps; and she beckoned him.

He thought, she's going to smuggle me in, and with positive relish he went up the steps, which had been cleared completely of snow, and then salted. The lights were on in the lobby behind her. Three men came out in quick succession, carrying suitcases, but there seemed nothing strange in that.

He reached the lobby. As he expected, the long reception desk was empty, but two more men and one woman appeared, carrying suitcases. Toni was in the passage beyond the lobby, still beckoning. There was much more to her than he had realised, he told himself.

He went into the passage to join her.

A man, standing close to the wall, simply drove a knife between his ribs, piercing his heart with a single thrust.

"It's empty—absolutely empty," Keller told Palfrey, two and a half hours later. "I watched for half an hour, and no one came in or out, so I decided to investigate. I've eight men in here with me. There seems to be a tunnel, leading to the laboratory and workshops. I'm sending four men to investigate. Is that—"

The floor of the Oceanic Hotel heaved beneath him as he spoke, and he had one moment of realisation, of horror, before the explosion came. He was blown with terrible force against the wall behind him, and as his body smashed, another and yet another explosion followed.

# 9

# HOLOCAUST

Palfrey, hearing the exasperation, even the anger, in Keller's voice, was half-amused by it, but at the same time disturbed about this news. Here was alarming evidence that everything Z5 did was known in advance: news of this particular move could only have been given through Z5 agents. Then he recalled that the police had been told, but a leakage seemed no more likely and was no less disturbing at Scotland Yard than in Z5.

"I'm sending four men to investigate," Keller was saying. "Is that—"

He broke off.

There was a split second pause before a roar came with such devastating suddenness that it seemed to smash Palfrey's ear, made him back away and drop the instrument, which clattered on to his desk, then dropped on to the carpeted floor. He couldn't hear; just sat back in his chair, hands covering his ears, the roaring sound going through his splitting head, smashing against his skull, his eyes, his ears. He did not know how long he was there, but suddenly the door opened and Joyce came rushing in, with a man behind her.

"Sap! Are you all right?" There was terror in her eyes.

He hardly heard what she said. Joyce's whole body seemed to be shaking, but Palfrey realised that was the effect of the blast on his eyes. She was close to him, gasping his name. The man—Kendall—now third in command at Z5, was on the other side.

Palfrey pointed to the telephone and realised at once that they did not understand—they believed there was

something in the instrument. That was obvious from the way Kendall knelt beside it gingerly. Palfrey shook his head. He couldn't speak, couldn't really hear, his head was still going round and round and strange noises were roaring through it; but his mind was beginning to work again.

What had happened?

What kind of horror was there in Cromwell Road?

At the time of the explosion, the wide thoroughfare which ran between London and the south-west had been as crammed with traffic as it could be, and yet much quieter than usual. The snow, still thick at the sides of the roads, on roofs and walls and window ledges, muffled the sound until it seemed almost artificial as if coming from a world far away from this one. Two policemen were in control of traffic near the BEA terminal, others were in sight. Four of Keller's men were at vantage points at four nearby corners, to make sure no one came out of the Oceanic Hotel without being seen. The pavements were crowded. Two groups of African students were walking along, excited at seeing snow for the first time in their lives. A smaller, older group of Pakistanis, the women wearing thick shawls or heavy coats over their gay saris, stood to one side to allow the youths to pass. There was a constant stream of people coming from the side streets. Hotels and shops had their lights full on, car headlights were on and dipped, there was something Christmassy, peaceful and yet gay about the scene. No hooters blared; motorists kept their tempers in spite of the delay.

Then, the awful blast came.

Then, there followed the holocaust.

Most who were within sight of the Oceanic Hotel never knew what happened; there was a roar, a blast, and then instantaneous death. There was the whining rush of wind and the unbelievable thunder of the explosion,

before the whole of the hotel blew up, lit by a fierce glow which came from the cellars and the ground floors of each of the connected houses.

A few people, all further away, stunned to stillness and to silence, saw the building split asunder. Against the red glow they saw whole walls break into pieces, huge blocks of masonry fly hundreds of feet into the air. Then they saw the debris falling and were themselves hit by the blast or by a killer-block, or bricks, or flying glass —or cars, which were lifted out of the road and hurled thirty, forty, fifty feet away, striking down the people who were on foot.

Fire burned furiously in the heart of the destroyed buildings, but in some ways the worst harm came from the cars which were wrenched asunder and spilled their petrol, bursting into flames.

The silence died.

First, there was a single scream, followed by another and another. More joined in, until there was groaning and screaming and wailing from countless people on the fringe of the crowd. There was little sound and hardly any movement from the roadway outside the hotel; there was only wreckage, and blood, and torn and broken flesh, and stillness. In the stillness one car engine buzzed its solitary defiance.

The wailing and the screaming and the groaning grew and grew.

Slowly, those who had seen the horror, or who heard it, began to realise the extent of this disaster. Policemen began to call for ambulances and for help, and a police sergeant, running up the steps of a small hotel and peering over the scene, summed it up in cryptic words as he spoke over his radio to the Information Room at Scotland Yard.

"It's a major disaster, no doubt about it. I'd guess a hundred dead, a thousand injured—and several fires have started in the hotels. If you ask me the whole area

wants clearing. We ought to divert all traffic from Hyde Park Corner to Bayswater Road and the Embankment. We'll need a hundred ambulances, that's for sure."

The word was passed on, swift as light.

"Fire Service—all London area call to Earl's Court."

"Police—Traffic Branch. All approach routes to Cromwell Road to be cordoned off and diversions made at . . ."

"Hospital Emergency Service to be fully mobilised, at once."

"Civil Defence mobilisation required immediately for the central and south west London area."

"Help on a large scale is needed from all barracks within a ten mile radius of central London."

Call after call went out, and the response was immediate and efficient. Teams of rescue workers from the police, civil defence and the army were on the scene within ten minutes, the terrible task of finding the wounded and separating them from the dead began.

And the temperature fell. From two or three below freezing point, cold by London standards, it dropped to eight and nine and ten below. The first aid stations were too cold; schools and churches, halls and hotels and many private houses were thrown open, hospitals were put on emergency service, urgent summonses went out for doctors, nurses, orderlies, ambulances—for bandages, blood plasma, stretchers, antiseptics. The area was like a giant field hospital close behind the scene of a battle still being fiercely waged.

But there was no battle. All was quiet now. Where there had been a hotel, there was smoking, burning rubble. Where there had been laboratories and offices, there were gaping walls and collapsing girders and water rushing from the mains, only to freeze. Over all this was the stink of gas and the odour of death.

From a spot on the roof of the BEA terminal building the main disaster area could be seen. By the time Palfrey

reached the spot, still half-deafened by the explosion over the telephone, floodlights had been rigged up on the roof and on the tops of houses, the whole scene was illuminated and showed up in hideous detail.

He stood absolutely still, chilled to the bone with horror.

He watched the work going on and he could see the agony on so many human faces and the work that had to be done. He could see the fires, many still blazing, and the smoke and the steam, and the jets of water freezing as they left the hoses.

In the midst of all this, he saw the beautiful face of a woman.

Mercia's.

Should he go and see her, or was it wiser to stay away?

The question was hardly in his mind before Palfrey realised that though he took it for granted that she would still be at the Knightsbridge house, there was no certainty. If she was connected with tonight's crime, she would surely have vanished by now. He was aware of the intent stare of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, the Chief Fire Officer, two highly-placed members of the Home Office and of young Michael Debrett, personal representative of the Prime Minister, who looked more like a Guards officer than a politician. None of them spoke to him as he turned to their host, the second-in-command of the terminal.

"Are the telephones working?"

"We've some lines free, yes, sir."

"I'd like to make a call."

"This way, sir."

The second-in-command, who looked almost young enough to be at school, led the way. Debrett stirred, as if to follow, then turned back to survey the scene. Everyone who saw it was stunned and appalled. Ambulances

re still waiting with their doors open, while hundreds men worked among the rubble, lifting bricks and mor- and twisted girders off the crushed limbs and broken dies of the victims beneath.

The telephone was at the end of a nearby passage. Pal- y touched the receiver, hesitated, then recalled the mber, and dialed. The ringing sound started at once. e wouldn't be there, of course. *Brrr-brrr-brrr-brrr.*

There was a break in the ringing, and a woman said: his is Mr. Harvey-Lee's house."

"Is Mrs. Harvey-Lee there, please?"

"Yes, I think so." The speaker was Ida, Palfrey knew, re was an unmistakable timbre to her voice. "Who is at, please?"

"Dr. Palfrey."

"Oh, hallo, Dr. Palfrey!" The girl seemed delighted to ar him. "I won't be a moment—I think Aunt Mercia is oking at the news."

"I'll hold on," Palfrey said.

The silence which followed seemed to drag on for a ng time—long enough for Mercia Harvey-Lee to have come alarmed, and to have left the house. Why was he sure, and yet so afraid, that she would want to run ay?

There was a sound at the other end of the line, and ercia's distinctive voice came to him clearly.

"Good evening, Dr. Palfrey."

"What do you think of the news?" Palfrey asked, and could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"It is dreadful," she said. "Quite dreadful."

"What do you know about it?" Palfrey demanded.

She hardly paused before answering: "I know that it is very bad that I would not like to think it could ever ppen again."

"Could it?" Palfrey barked.

This time she did not answer immediately, and he ought she would hang up on him. He could hear a

sound, which he thought was her agitated breathin
Only the notice of instruction, *How To Use This Tel*
*phone,* was in front of him, framed and glazed and stu
on to a pale grey background, but he could see th
woman's face—this woman's *faces*—as clearly as if sh
were there. Gradually, the two faces seemed to merg
the beautiful one slid, as it were, over the fat one, unt
there was only beauty.

"Could it happen again?" Palfrey repeated, and th
time his voice was near to cracking.

"It could," Mercia Harvey-Lee answered gravely.
only hope that it never will. Goodnight, Dr. Palfrey."

She rang off with slow deliberation, and Palfrey hea
the echo along the line. He stood for fully a minute b
fore he put his receiver down, then turned, to find th
BEA man gone and young Debrett in his place. Debre
was looking at him curiously, as if both puzzled an
alarmed at what he saw.

"Dr. Palfrey," he asked at last, "do you know the cau
of this?"

"I'm not sure," Palfrey said.

"Isn't it the result of an investigation you are making

Palfrey felt a great weight pressing against his for
head; saw, reflected in a window, the floodlights and th
scene of carnage. He did not look away from Debrett.

"I'm afraid so, yes."

"You know you are under an obligation to report
Her Majesty's Government if you have any reason to b
lieve the safety of the realm is endangered, don't you?"

The rest of the party who had been watching with Pa
frey came out of the room and headed along the passag
None of them paused but all looked hard—deman
ingly?—at Palfrey as they passed.

"Yes," he said to Debrett.

"I think I should make an appointment for you wi
the Prime Minister," Debrett said, his voice flat and e
pressionless. He looked and sounded as if he we

rhting to repress his emotions and was afraid of what ould happen if he relaxed his hold on himself. "He is ie back from the North tomorrow morning."

"Whatever time is convenient for him will be for me," lalfrey answered.

Debrett nodded and turned away, tight-lipped. His hole manner implied that he blamed Palfrey for what d happened, and Palfrey knew, coldly and logically, at it *was* his fault; there would be no argument about at. Yet immediately he began to argue. Fault? Respon- ility? He had taken only the first tentative steps to an quiry, had not even begun to force the issue. Perhaps should have, earlier. Oh, that was nonsensical! Idiotic! He walked in Debrett's wake toward an exit on the ner side of the terminal, where his car was waiting for m. He felt cold—cold as the biting night. As he crossed his car, the wind lashed viciously at his unprotected ad. His chauffeur got out.

"You should be wearing a hat, sir."

"Yes," agreed Palfrey, hardly knowing what the man d said. He bent low to get in, and slumped down in dden warmth. The chauffeur closed the door and took e wheel again. "Coldest night I've known since I was Moscow, four winters ago."

Moscow. Stefan Andromovitch.

"Straight back to the hotel, sir?"

"I'll tell you in a minute," Palfrey said. "Go *via* nightsbridge."

"Very good, sir."

"Go *via* Knightsbridge," Palfrey repeated to himself. It as almost as if his subconscious was telling him what to . The truth was that he knew what to do but was re- ctant to face it—not for its own sake but because of ie possible consequences. He had staged a reconnais- nce on the Oceanic Hotel and the laboratory and the nsequences had been too terrible to contemplate. If he ere to stage a raid now on Mercia Harvey-Lee's house,

what would they be? There was another, equally pertinent question: what would they be if he didn't?

He knew that he was allowing himself to be blackmailed into leaving the woman alone, that he ought to take both her and her niece to Z5, and have them interrogated. It would be folly not to—but it might prove deadly if he did.

He sat hunched up in his coat, watching the passers-by, the street lights, the occasional car. They made several detours, directed by police and Civil Defence workers, and came into Knightsbridge close to Harrods.

He leaned forward.

'Drop me here," he said. "And as soon as I've got out, call the Night Controller—no, I'll do that myself. Don't wait for me."

"Sir, you really should have a hat——here! Take this scarf and wrap it round your head. It doesn't matter what you look like on a night like this."

That remark broke through Palfreys mood, and brought a smile.

"No, it certainly doesn't." He took the thin woollen scarf. "Thank you, Johnny." As he got out of the car, stepping very carefully on the frozen snow, he saw two men get out of another car across the road. One was Duros, and he beckoned the agent, who came up briskly. "Don't follow me," Palfrey ordered.

Duros caught his breath.

"Are you sure that's wise, sir?"

"No," Palfrey said, "I'm not sure, but I think it might be the only way to find out what's going on."

# 10

# THE HOUSE BY NIGHT

"Have you seen Smart?" Palfrey asked, when Duros did not answer.

"He called me just before the explosion," Duros said at last. "The girl had told him that most of the people at the hotel worked in Allcott Street, and that they were making a special kind of pill. He was going to try to get into the place with her, sir. Went straight there from the telephone."

Palfrey closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You be careful."

"I'm much more concerned about you," Duros said.

"I am going to send orders—" Palfrey hesitated, and then rooted for his cigarette lighter. His head was bitterly cold and the wind stung his cheeks and eyes; he really should be wearing the scarf. He twisted it impatiently round his head and immediately felt warmer. He flicked on the lighter. Joyce answered; he could be quite sure she would not rest tonight until she had seen him again. "Joyce," he said. "I'm going to the Harvey-Lee house, on my own, and I'm not to be closely followed. But I'd like a cordon thrown round Donegal Square—not in the square itself but in the approach roads. If I don't come out by—what's the time?"

"A quarter to eleven."

"If I'm not out by one o'clock, close in and have everyone in the house detained."

Joyce was silent for a long moment, then spoke very quietly and reasoningly.

"You realise they might blow it up, don't you?"

Palfrey said: "They have some very valuable antiques and pictures there."

"They may have moved them by now."

"Yes," agreed Palfrey. "I'll be back before two. You get something to eat." He flicked off, aware of Duros staring intently, even more aware of the cutting wind and a patch of bitter cold about one ear.

"Dr. Palfrey," Duros said.

"Yes?"

"Keller, Smart and at least ten of our people died at the explosion—and two are so badly injured that they may never be normal again."

"Yes," Palfrey repeated, but in a very different tone.

"What makes you think they will respect your life any more than those of others?"

Duros put the question with a kind of restrained bellicosity, the strength of his feeling bringing out a strong individuality which Palfrey had never noticed in him before.

"The probability is that they did it as a lesson to me," Palfrey told him, "though I haven't any clear idea what the lesson is about. Go back to H.Q. and ask Joyce Morgan to get a summary of the overseas obesity reports, will you?" The phrase, coming unbidden, brought a little smile to his lips, and it also seemed to relax Duros, who gave up and moved away.

Palfrey turned towards Donegal Square. As he reached the corner a blast of wind struck him, cutting through the thick overcoat as if it were made of paper. He quickened his pace, slipped, steadied, and went on more cautiously. His teeth began to chatter, and were still chattering when he reached the porch of Number 17.

No light was on.

With a sense of shock he thought of Joyce's gloomy comment, that they might blow the house up. He knew

why she feared it, but until this moment had not really taken it seriously; yet it *was* possible.

He rang the bell.

There was another possibility; that since his telephone call, Mercia had left here. A sudden blast of wind howled along the square and stormed into the porch like a whirlwind, striking at his legs, making him shiver even more. And now he felt a weight of terrible depression. If this move was futile, what could he usefully do next?

A light went on. Almost at the same moment he heard footsteps inside, quick by heavy, those of a man. The door opened, and was almost blown out of the man's hand by a gust of wind. He stood quickly to one side so that Palfrey could get past, then slammed the door. The hall light was subdued, and there was another equally subdued glow at the top of the stairs.

Palfrey asked: "Is Mrs. Harvey-Lee in?"

"I'll see, sir," the man said. "Who shall I say has called?"

"Dr. Palfrey."

"Dr. Palfrey," the man echoed, as if the name were quite new to him. "If you will wait here, sir—it's warmer."

He opened a door into a cloakroom, the one from which Ida Smith had appeared that morning. A big electric radiator took up the whole of one wall. Hats, coats, umbrellas and Wellingtons—all quite small and not large enough for him—strewed the further side, while a long comfortable couch lay against a third. Palfrey unwound the scarf, stood by the radiator, and then caught a glimpse of himself in a small mirror.

His nose, red and nipped, looked twice its usual length. His eyes were rimmed and watery and his hair flattened and dishevelled by the scarf. He decided that he looked positively repulsive. Pushing the scarf into his pocket, he took off the coat and ran his fingers through

his hair. This made a slight improvement, but there was nothing he could do about his nose and his eyes. He ran his hand over his face, to try to restore the circulation, and his fingers as well as his nose began to burn. It would be impossible to be at a greater disadvantage when meeting a woman.

Slowly thawing out, he began to wonder how long she would keep him, and to think more about the manner of the servant who had admitted him. Had that echoed "Dr Palfrey" been an act, or did the man in fact have no idea who he was?

He heard footsteps on the stairs, and the man reappeared.

"Mrs. Harvey-Lee will be glad to see you, sir." He behaved like a footman or butler, not at all like a murderous villain. Palfrey smiled at him, vaguely, and then preceded him up the stairs.

He was nearly at the top when he heard a scream.

It was some distance off, and muted. He wondered if it could be imagination; then suddenly it was repeated. The man had drawn level with him on the landing, but took no notice of the sound, which came from a door on the right. The drawing room where he had been this morning was on the left.

Another scream came, and he heard: *"I will see him, will!"* Then a door slammed, and the screaming was shut off.

"This way, sir," the man said. He opened the door on the left, and announced: "Dr. Palfrey, Madam."

Palfrey went in, fighting the temptation to rush towards the scream.

The room was exactly as it had been, except that the velvet curtains were drawn and lights were on at the pictures and at two standard lamps. If anything, she looked more beautiful—and if anything, so did Merci Harvey-Lee. She wore a sleeveless dress, cut in a sweeping curve, and her arms, shoulders and throat

mooth as marble, seemed to glow. She stood by the side f a coal fire which blazed cheerfully, reassuringly. On ne low table between the comfortable chairs was coffee n the same silver pot, a decanter, brandy and liqueur asses, and some chocolate-covered mints. The picture ruck Palfrey with almost nostalgic vividness. His oughts raced back ten years, to the days when he ould come home, troubled and apprehensive and epressed, to find Drusilla waiting for him, and warmth nd comfort gradually easing out his tensions.

Almost as if she knew how Drusilla had usually reeted him, Mercia Harvey-Lee held out both her ands. He found himself taking them.

"Have you had dinner?" she asked.

"I—er—yes, all I need, thank you."

"You're sure? You look perished."

"Yes," he said. "I was." He found himself smiling. "I now what I look like, there's a mirror in the cloakroom."

"Did Jones put you in there? What a shame! Do sit own." She stood looking at him, and then with a swift nd decisive movement, pressed a bell by the fireplace. lmost at once the door opened. "Jones, Dr. Palfrey asn't had dinner."

"Oh, but I—"

"Very good, Madam," Jones said.

Palfrey sat back, his feet and legs really warm at last, is knees almost too hot. He knew that she was deliber- tely being disarming, and that in one way she was suc- eeding, but he was wary too, and fully aware of what e would have to do. For the moment it would be best to elax and to go along with her mood. He must be at his est when he went over to attack.

"We're so used to friends and members of the family oming in at odd hours that there's always something eady," she said. "Jones will bring a tray."

"That will be just right."

"You shouldn't be careless about your meals," Mercia

reproved. "You can't concentrate properly unless you ea
well, *and* eat what's good for you."

"You have the maternal instinct very strongly devel
oped," he remarked.

Her eyes laughed at him.

"You mean the womanly or the wifely instinct!"

"I'll settle for that," said Palfrey. "Do I spy whisky?"

"Oh, how foolish of me—of course!" she was very def
pouring out a generous tot, using a soda syphon expertly
placing the glass on a small silver tray.

He sipped.

"Thank you."

"Aren't you going to wish me good health?"

He hesitated, and said at last: "I'm not sure whether
want you to have good health."

"Oh, how ungallant of you!" but her voice still hel
laughter.

"Yes," Palfrey said. "You would be surprised how un
gallant I can be when I have just lost a dozen or more o
my own highly-skilled and perfectly-trained men—an
when I've just seen the results of an explosion whic
killed over a hundred people and gravely injured te
times as many more. If you had anything at all to d
with that—" He broke off.

"You don't wish me health," she said.

"You know, Mercia," he said, using her Christian nam
for the first time, "this isn't even remotely funny."

She held his gaze for at least a minute, and the laug
ter died out of her eyes.

"You know, Sap," she said, "you aren't being even r
motely realistic. I'm sorry if some of the men who di
were your friends, but you of all people shouldn't se
timentalise over them or anyone else. And yet since y
are in love with that dream, I suppose it is inevitable.
may even be a waste of time going on."

"Going on with what?"

"Trying to win your support."

"If that's what you're attempting to do, you're going a range way about it."

She sank gracefully into a chair, putting her hands out wards the fire as if to shield her face from the flames.

"After two nations fight in war," she said, "after ey've been bombing each other's cities and sinking ch other's ships, trying to kill and maim and starve ci- lians—what happens? One side or the other gives in, d immediately begins to co-operate. Both join hands to store the country which had been most damaged. And ry often talks go on between some authorities on either de before hostilities cease. Isn't all this true?"

The firelight put a fierce light into her eyes as she ooked at him.

"Yes," he agreed.

"So what is different?"

"We are not at war."

"Oh, don't be absurd!" she exclaimed. "Really, there re moments when I wonder if you *can* be the man ou're supposed to be. I—but wait a moment."

There was a tap on the door, and Jones came in with a ray on which were several silver dishes, knives and orks, everything needed for a meal. Mercia brought a mall folding table, placed it before Palfrey, and mo- oned to Jones, who put the tray down. It was at exactly ne right height for eating in comfort.

"Is there anything else, Madam?"

"Bring some fresh coffee in half an hour, will you?"

"Very good, Madam." Jones went out.

Mercia took the cover off the smallest dish, revealing a eaming bowl of soup. Palfrey began to eat. There was minute steak, parsley garnished potatoes, and cau- flower with a sauce of rare distinction; and there was uit salad with thick cream. He had been very hungry, fter all, and he was aware that his greater danger was being seduced by the warmth and the comfort and the od food. To get her to talk freely, he must adjust his

attitude to hers; he had already discovered that she seemed to reveal more after moments of exasperation with him, and he knew just how exasperating he could be.

Suddenly, Mercia said: "We have been at war for years."

"Who has?"

"Those whom you represent and those whom my husband and I represent."

"You forgot to declare war," Palfrey said.

"What a Wellingtonian sound that has! You must know that no one declares war these days."

"But the first act of aggression calls for retaliation," said Palfrey. "Only after retaliation can the world know that the war is on."

"That's only because it's open and obvious aggression," Mercia argued. "Communists commit acts of war all the time but they operate within the law, or else secretly and no one can strike back because they don't know where to strike. But the war goes on all the same. It's been going on in this country in one form or another for sixty years. You don't deny that, do you?"

"No," he had to say.

"So you can't deny that if one side has been making war but the other side hasn't realised it, the war is nevertheless still a war. And the aggressor force might win a bloodless victory and not reveal that it was the aggressor, or what it was trying to do, until after the victory. Doesn't that make sense?"

It was no use making himself seem too obtuse.

"Yes," he conceded. "Whom do you represent?"

"The forces of sanity and intelligence," she answered.

"Do you, indeed!"

"And don't be so supercilious!" she retorted in a flash of vexation. "You really are the most exasperating man I've ever met."

"I'm sorry about that," Palfrey said. "I don't find you

e most soothing woman, you know. You seem to me to attempting to rationalise the irrational, to justify the unjustifiable. Neither can be done. Mercia—" He sat back in his chair, replete. "I've been doing what I'm doing now for a long time. Nearly fifteen years. Every year or so someone comes to the conclusion that he is God. He dislikes, disapproves of, is even often disgusted with society as it is, and decides that he can create a better one. He—"

She turned to look at him full face, her cheeks flushed. "Sap—"

"Let me finish," Palfrey said. He stretched his legs out, looking—and to his own astonishment feeling—absolutely relaxed. "This self-appointed God is sometimes mad, but more often sane with a great number of good ideas. He has money and he wins or pays for supporters. In these days of nuclear power and highly advanced technology and applied sciences, the man may get possession of a wonder drug or a weapon against which for the time being there is no defence. He has had a look round at the world at large and doesn't like what he's seen. The standard of education and so the standard of applied intelligence is low. A great number of people—many millions of them—are under-nourished, which makes them sub-standard physically and often sub-standard mentally. There are wars, famines, strikes. Half the world's energy is used up in useless conflict, so the self-appointed God says: 'Get rid of half the people and we'll raise the standard so high that the world will never look back. With only half the people to feed, there will be plenty of food, with plenty of food we can create the conditions for perfect physical and so mental fitness. The world really will be a wonderful place to live in.' "

Palfrey stopped, and waited for Mercia Harvey-Lee's reaction. When it did not come at once, he went on gently:

"Aren't you and your friends playing God?"

# 11

# IDA PLEADS

From the moment when he had said "Let me finish" Mer cia had been studying Palfrey with increasing intensity He saw, through his half-closed eyes, that she was aston ished. The fire in her eyes died away and in its place wa a glow, almost of wonder. She sat quiet still, one han still shielding her face; and she was breathing so quietl that she hardly seemed to be breathing at all.

Slowly, almost whispering, she said:

"Sap, you—you are magnificent. They were righ about you." When he didn't answer, she went on: "I'v never heard it put so—so lucidly, so vividly. That is ex actly what they say."

Palfrey did not ask who "they" were, but waited fo her to go on. When she did, there were stars in her eye

"It doesn't matter who had tried before," she said. "W can succeed. But we need your help."

Drily, Palfrey remarked: "A lot of self-appointed sa iours though I might make a good disciple, too. Som how, I never do."

"But if we convince you that we're right, you won't— you can't—refuse."

Palfrey almost said: "You can't convince me"—an then bit the words back. She was looking at him almo adoringly. It was an absurd word to use about himsel but it was the right one. In those few minutes, since h had talked with such fluency and understanding, it w as if she had been dazzled—mesmerised—by him, and i such a mood she might believe anything he wanted h to.

"If I were convinced," he said, gruffly, "that would be ferent."

"And you are *exactly* the man we want!"

"Mercia," Palfrey said, frankly, "I would make a very i God."

"You don't have to be a God," she retorted. "You have be a man of vision and you have to have a worldwide anisation which will do exactly what you tell it. *We* ve an organisation which is very powerful in certain ces but is nothing like so widespread as yours. Sap—en to me."

She held out her hands, and again he took them, partly ause it was instinctive to do so, partly because he w that the more impressed he seemed to be, the more would confide. There was another reason, too: she s quite beautiful, and he responded to the woman; he uld have done so at that moment whatever the circumstances, whatever subject they had been discussing.

"Sap, listen to me," she repeated. "I have always be-ved you could help, and so has my husband. Professor ll hasn't—he would have preferred you dead. He nted you to be killed but I sent two men to warn you danger."

"And they led my men to the hotel and the laboratory, ich in turn led to the disaster," Palfrey remarked avily.

"Yes," she said, "but sooner or later those places had to destroyed. Eustace knew about them, that was why had to be killed. He—"

"Morro knew!" exclaimed Palfrey.

"Yes," said Mercia, quite positively. "He once followed there, and sooner or later you would have found out, Tonight was chosen because of the tremendous imt the disaster would make, and because it would w *you* how helpless you really are."

"Of all the cold-blooded—" began Palfrey.

"Sap, stop being a fool!" she cried. "If we can bring

peace and plenty to the world as a result of one explosion which would hardly be noticed in a fullscale war, then every life was worth the sacrifice. Oh, Sap," she went on, "I know how you feel and think, how much freedom means to you. But you don't understand what *we* want. Every nation will remain free and sovereign—we don't want to take a single one over, and we don't want to set them against one another. Each nation will be stronger because the people are stronger and because there will be a higher common intelligence. Even the new nations, the emergent nations, will benefit—there will be fewer mouths to feed, but with modern technology they can overcome their agricultural and economic problems. Sap, you can't deny that it would be easier to cope if we were dealing with people whose health is immeasurably better than it is today."

"I don't deny it," he conceded painfully.

"And we can improve their health—we can make people fitter than they have ever been. They can live much longer—provided only that we reduce the world population. And *we* will be able to control the birthrate so that each couple has only two children—human beings simply reproduce themselves and the population of the world will be static. Then we can feed and educate and make everyone healthy. Sap, this *is* the answer."

"So you can control the birthrate, too," Palfrey said.

"Absolutely," Mercia told him.

"And the weight rate?"

She laughed, unexpectedly.

"You've seen what happened to Graven!"

"That isn't all, Mercia," he said, "I've seen what happened to you!"

Instead of laughing or smiling or dismissing that, she held his hands more tightly, and said:

"I was the first to experiment. I'd always been fat, and I'd always loved food. Gradually my weight began to increase, my appetite increased with it, and I simply hadn't

the will-power to cut down on my eating. I—I was *enormous.*" She jumped up and moved across the room, her grace and vigour quite remarkable. She took a big, blue-bound book from a shelf beneath a table, and brought it across. "*Look!*" She opened the book at about the middle, flicked over several pages and then turned the book round so that it rested on her knees and his, and he could see the photographs.

There were two—and each was a group. All the others, men and women, were of normal size, but she was there—as broad as any two of them—grotesquely fat. In both, she was smiling but Palfrey had a feeling that it was a set, posed smile. She flipped over another page and showed a photograph of herself, full length, alone. She must have weighed twice as much as any normal person—three times as much, perhaps. Next to it was a photograph of herself standing beside a tall, distinguished-looking man—and she dwarfed him. Again she turned a page, and she was exactly as she was now, tall, full-figured, normal.

"Is that your husband?" Palfrey asked.

"No. My brother."

"Nice looking chap," Palfrey remarked. "Is he involved?"

"No—but my husband is," Mercia said. "He financed it from the beginning."

"Which makes him very rich."

"Oh, money," she said carelessly. "We have all we need—and if we hadn't, the profit from our products make the movement self-supporting in every country. You've never been fat, so you will never understand how most human beings yearn to lose weight, how much one will pay for it."

"I've some idea," Palfrey said heavily. "So you are self-supporting."

"Yes, entirely."

"And very accessible," he said.

"I don't understand you."

"We need to find people who were fat and are now thin, and from those we'll find your agents, wherever they are."

"Our agents will not help you," Mercia said simply.

Palfrey thought of Ida, and the scream.

"Is there a photograph of your husband?" he asked.

"No," she answered. "Not here." She looked at him levelly, and then went on: "My husband prefers not to be seen. He has amassed millions, he is a brilliant consultant engineer, but he has a compelling personal reason for not wanting to be photographed, not wanting to be on show. He works through others whom he trusts, by telephone and by letter, but that is all. When he has finished this work, you will meet him and I believe you will understand."

Mercia closed the album slowly, and as slowly she stood up. She looked down on him for several seconds, and then walked across the room and slipped the book back into position. She turned to face him, regal, commanding.

"You mustn't attempt to find him or to seek out men who might work for us," she said. "Every place we use and every person is protected—like the hotel place and the laboratories in Cromwell Road. They were destroyed, today's disaster was deliberately staged, to show you *and* the world how powerful and if necessary how ruthless we can be. You mustn't do anything which would cause a repetition of that—if you do you will have only yourself to blame." She raised her hands, almost in supplication. "I am not responsible, there is nothing I can do to prevent it. The rules have been made, the plan of campaign prepared, and it goes into action automatically. It does not matter to us that a few people die, Sap. People are always dying of violence and usually it is purposeless violence, like road accidents. What we are doing isn't purposeless, and that justifies the measures we take.

When the time comes to reduce the population we shall be more selective, of course, but until we have control the killing will be haphazard—there is no other way to make you see how serious we are."

Palfrey, still sitting upright, didn't speak.

"So you can't risk searching for our hiding places," Mercia went on. "Once one is found—even when we have reason to believe it is found—it will be destroyed."

Palfrey felt too horrified to speak.

"Sap, you must believe me," Mercia went on. "This is *war*. The advance posts are all mined. Each is controlled by a man who will carry out orders, just as a soldier will. There is no argument and no appeal. You see, there are two forms of *Dio*—*Dio*-1 and *Dio*-2. *Dio*-1 reduces weight and conditions the mind. *Dio*-2 makes anyone who takes it do exactly what they are told by their superiors. Anyone who takes *Dio*-2 is absolutely subservient to us. They give up their old loyalties and become loyal only to us. There is no way at all you can win them back. There is absolutely nothing *you* can do."

Palfrey thought, in that awful moment of revelation: she could be right.

He stood up. She moved towards him slowly, arms outstretched as if to hold him, to reason with and to soothe him. He stood quite still. He felt that if she drew close he would strangle her, that he could not bear to touch her; her beauty had the very stench of death. Before she was near enough to touch him, however, there was a sound at the door. She stopped, and turned.

"Who is that?" She was sharp-voiced.

"Your coffee, Madam."

"Oh, damn the coffee!" she muttered under her breath. "All right, come in."

Jones appeared, coffee tray poised on one hand, silver pots aglow. He was lowering the tray to the table, when the door, left partially open, suddenly swung inwards and crashed against a chair.

Ida rushed in.

As Jones, half-bending, straightened up, Ida ran straight towards Palfrey. Mercia tried to stop her but the girl pushed her away, sending her staggering to one side. The tray went flying, coffee pot and sugar bowl falling into the fireplace, banging, echoing, ringing, cream jug upturned on the carpet. It all happened so quickly that Palfrey had no time to do anything before the girl had reached him, clutching him tightly.

"Take me away from here!" she gasped. "Take me away or they'll kill me!"

Very slowly, Jones moved forward.

Very slowly, Mercia recovered her balance and leaned against a tall chair.

Very slowly, Palfrey put his left arm about Ida, reassuringly, soothingly.

He expected Jones to draw a gun or some other weapon, but the man halted, looking at Mercia for instructions. The girl's body was quivering, and she clung convulsively. Now and again she gave a choking sob, but she did not speak again.

"Jones," Mercia said. "Clear those things up, and take them out. Have some more coffee ready when I call you. Ida, don't talk such nonsense. Help Jones to clear up the mess you've made, and don't give way to temper."

Ida didn't move. Jones righted the coffee pot, but coffee and sugar had spread, dark and sticky, all over the hearth.

"Take—take me away from here!" Ida gasped again. She peered up despairingly into Palfrey's face. "They will kill me as they've killed the others."

"Dr. Palfrey," said Mercia, "the child is hysterical, she simply doesn't know what she is saying."

"Oh," said Palfrey, reasonably. "She knows she's scared, though."

"She is hysterical, I tell you."

"No doubt," said Palfrey. He took his lighter from his pocket flicked it, and as the response from Z5 headquarters sounded clearly about the room he looked at Mercia and spoke in the most casual way imaginable. "Tell the cordon to move in unless I am outside Donegal Square with a girl—Ida Smith—within five minutes. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly understood," Joyce responded.

Mercia Harvey-Lee looked at the girl with cold anger, and said quietly:

"Don't take her, Dr. Palfrey. You can go, but don't take her. If you do, I can't answer for the consequences."

"I think you should try to," Palfrey said reasoningly. "I really do. Will you go to the head of the stairs and instruct whoever is there to allow me and Ida to pass."

"I've warned you, if you take that child—"

"*Take me away!*" Ida sobbed. "Please take me away."

Palfrey said to Mercia Harvey-Lee: "If you or anyone else makes any attempt to stop us, this house will be raided and everyone in it will be arrested. And any chance there ever was of making me understand your point of view will be gone."

He moved towards the door.

Jones, with everything now loaded on to the tray, took no notice of him but simply stared at the woman.

"Come along," Palfrey said to Ida. "You'll be all right. Let me go, or I can't walk."

Slowly and reluctantly, Ida drew away but clung to his arm. Mercia was breathing heavily and there was fury in her eyes; if anything, it made her look even more regal and imposing. Palfrey began to move towards the door. He did not see what more he could do. It would be a waste of time giving Mercia further orders, and he had to take a chance. Jones stood like an automaton, as if he had no mind of his own.

"Sap," Mercia said, in a softer tone, "I beg you not to take the child."

*"They'll kill me,"* Ida said hoarsely. "They kill everyone who shows any sign of weakness."

"If you want to see her again, come and see me," Palfrey said to the older woman. "Messages to the Elite Hotel will always find me."

He reached the door and stepped on to the landing. No one else was in sight but the door across the way was wide open. Palfrey urged the girl forward and she began to go down. Nothing happened and no one followed. He was almost at the foot of the stairs when he recalled how cold it would be outside, that neither of them should go out like this. But to pause to put on more clothes seemed to be stretching their luck too far.

They reached the floor, and Palfrey made sure the cloakroom was empty.

"Get a coat, and bring mine," he said to Ida.

The girl shot a frightened glance over her shoulder, then went to obey. Palfrey looked up. He had expected a bullet in his back; or a knife; certainly some kind of attempt to stop him. But nothing happened at all. Mercia stood alone at the head of the stairs.

"Sap, this is the biggest mistake you ever made in your life." Her voice was quite calm and very clear. "Leave Ida behind, I beg you."

Ida appeared, her own coat on, Palfrey's in her hands. Palfrey moved so that she could help him on with it. There was still time for someone to attack before they left the house and even when they were outside there would be danger. It was even possible that there would be another explosion, another "act of war" in an attempt to compel him to come to terms.

Ida opened the door, and the wind cut in like the blade of a knife.

"Dr. Palfrey," Mercia called, "if you allow the child to step outside this house, you will regret it all your life, and she *will* be killed. She will come to no harm if she

returns to me now—I promise you that. Send her back, and go out alone."

Ida snatched at the door, to open it wider.

"Don't believe her," she gasped. "If I ever go back, they'll kill me!"

"Sap," Mercia begged, "don't take her. As you value your life and all you believe in, send her back to me."

## 12

# THE APPEAL

Palfrey opened the door wide, and Ida darted out.

He did not look back again but stepped outside and pulled at the door; he had to pull hard against the wind, and still it did not close properly. Ida, coat swept wide open, waited at the foot of the porch. No one was in sight, but a cat darted on to the steps and meowed plaintively as the door closed. Instinctively, Palfrey opened it again and the cat squeezed inside. Then he pulled harder, and the door slammed.

Palfrey went cautiously down the steps, for the frozen snow was treacherous, and he must not risk the slightest injury now. He reached the girl.

"Button up your coat," he ordered.

"I—I can't thank you enough, but—but we must hurry!" She began to run, pulling her coat together as she did so; could there be any doubt at all of her fear?

Palfrey felt as if the bitter cold, striking at his bones, brought terror with it. He had never been more afraid. Mercia had meant what she said; there could be awful reprisals for this defiance, and they might come now, at any moment. Somehow, it seemed that the further away they got from the house the safer they would be, and he started to run, too; but he slipped and nearly fell.

"You—you go on," he gasped. "There'll be—cars round the corner."

She waited, clinging to him, but he could hear her saying under her breath, "Hurry, please hurry!" They reached a corner and he looked round, desperately. The scene was quite lovely, the lamplight and the lights from

some of the windows shone on the snow and a crescent moon hung low over the very house he had just left.

The lights were on there, too; they had not been when he had arrived.

He moved out of the square, out of sight of the house, and nothing happened.

At the far end of this street were several cars, headlights on but dipped. Men stood beside them and two of their number broke away and came hurrying. The one in the lead was Duros, hardly recognisable because of the astrakhan hat pulled low over his forehead and ears. He moved very fast. Beyond him were several other men, dark figures moving against the white. A car pulled up alongside, and as Duros opened the door he asked:

"Is the young lady with you, sir?"

"Yes. In you get, Ida!"

"Expecting trouble?" asked Duros.

"I don't know," answered Palfrey. "I really don't know. Withdraw the cordon at once, will you?"

Duros said "Right!" and slammed the door on Palfrey, who dropped into his seat, gulping for breath. Ida twisted round to stare out of the back window, as if utterly terrified at the thought of being followed. The driver started off as Palfrey ordered:

"The hotel."

"Right, sir."

The car, driven surprisingly fast, turned into Knightsbridge and then right, towards Piccadilly. It was here that the two men had accosted Palfrey, here that the significance of the affair had first become known to him. How long had it been going on? Five years? Since Mercia had begun to lose weight? He glanced at Ida and saw her staring at him, her more immediate fears allayed. She smiled, and the passing lights and the shadows which followed were kind to her; yet her large mouth was all too plain to see, so were her wide-spaced teeth. She slipped a hand into his.

"Thank you," she said simply.

"You'll have to tell me all you know," Palfrey said.

"Yes, of course."

"Tonight."

"Whenever you like," Ida promised quietly. She squeezed his hand, no longer in a nervous spasm. "I didn't think she would let us go."

"I was surprised, too," Palfrey said. There might be a "welcome" waiting for them at the hotel, but he clung to one hope that "they" wanted his co-operation badly enough for them not to injure him. As the thought passed through his mind, he wondered: how cold-blooded can you get? *I'm* all right. But that wasn't really the thought in his mind, it was more a hangover from fear and horror and near despair.

What would "they" do because he had brought Ida away?

Was it possible that his last words would discourage, even dissuade them from taking any immediate revenge?

The car turned off Piccadilly towards the Elite. Few people were about, and those few were bent against the wind, holding hats on, clutching their coats close. The car pulled up outside the main entrance, and a doorman who was also a Z5 agent opened the door, another man turned and went in through the revolving doors. Palfrey, noticing everything, was not sure whether he had seen the man before; he was suspicious of everything, his nerves almost unbearably on edge.

He hustled Ida through, and followed.

There was nothing unusual in the lobby, which was as brightly lit as ever, and fairly crowded. Music sounded from a door which led to the resident cabaret show. Two men on Z5's staff went ahead, and Palfrey reached the lift which would take them up to his pent-house or down to Z5 headquarters. He pressed the up button, and the elevator doors opened almost at once.

They stepped in, and were alone for the first time

since they had left the house in Donegal Square. Ida looked up at Palfrey. She did not smile, but seemed relaxed and rested. The ever-present possibility that the whole thing could be a trick to win his confidence in Ida, grew stronger. The shouting, the pleading, the quarrel with Mercia, might all have been staged so that he would do exactly what he had done. He knew one thing she did not even dream of, that when she had talked to him she would have to undergo stringent lie-detector tests; that she would be questioned, under drugs, to make sure that every word she had said was true.

The lift stopped.

Every time they stopped or moved from one place to another Palfrey felt an increasing tension, expecting some sign that Mercia's threat would be carried out.

Everything was normal.

A Z5 agent, on duty at the pent-house whenever there was an emergency, opened the door. Lights were on, other members of the staff would be here, Joyce would have made sure everything he could possibly need was at hand.

Then he heard Ida gasp, and on that instant saw a huge man step out of a room on the right, a giant who was neither fat nor thin; a smiling giant whose expression showed real delight at this encounter, a simple pleasure in having taken Palfrey by surprise.

Palfry exclaimed: "Stefan!"

"Hallo, Sap," said Stefan Andromovitch in a deep, powerful voice. "Why *is* it always so good to see you?"

Palfrey actually laughed as they gripped hands.

"I can't imagine," he said. "I simply can't imagine!"

His smile faded, and Stefan Andromovitch's expression also changed. Palfrey knew that the Russian would not have come unless there were some kind of emergency in Moscow, almost certainly to do with Z5's general request to agents—and that meant that within an hour of getting the message, Stefan had started for London. Once the

first flush of pleasure was past, foreboding descended upon him, and he felt tension even greater than before.

Yet he was almost formal as he said:

"Stefan, let me introduce Miss Ida Smith."

"We don't need to be introduced," said Stefan, very gently, and as Palfrey looked from one to the other, went on: "Do we, Miss Smith?"

Ida Smith was still standing where she had stopped when she had first seen him. It seemed to Palfrey that in that moment she was as frightened of Stefan Andromovitch as she had been of Mercia Harvey-Lee. She did not look away from the Russian, did not make any appeal to him, but she was obviously shocked into numbed silence.

So was Palfrey seeing the grimness in Stefan's expression, the growing fear in the girl's.

At last, she moved. She raised her hands in a helpless little gesture, moved to a chair and dropped into it. She looked absolutely defeated, as if this new shock had undone all the good that Palfrey and the half-hour of relaxation had done for her.

Before Palfrey could speak, the telephone bell rang.

Palfrey glanced at it but made no immediate move. A man hovered in the doorway, then came in and lifted the telephone.

"This is Dr. Palfrey's residence . . . Yes, I think so . . . Yes, what name shall I give? . . . Very well, madam." The man covered the mouthpiece with his hand and looked at Palfrey. "A Mrs. Mercia Harvey-Lee would like to speak to you, sir," he said.

Palfrey moved to the telephone.

The situation would have been bad enough had Stefan not sprung that devastating surprise, but the last thing he wanted to do at this moment was speak to Mercia. He watched Ida and Stefan looking at each other, raised one hand in resignation, and lifted the telephone.

"This is Palfrey," he announced.

"Sap,' said Mercia, "if you send her back, there won't be any reprisals."

"Well, well," said Palfrey. "So she's that important."

"Don't throw this chance away," Mercia seemed to plead. "I meant everything I said, and it's all true. Don't be stubborn for the sake of it. If you send her back by noon tomorrow, there need to be no reprisals. And Sap . . ." There was a brief pause, before Mercia went on: "I begged them to give you this chance, and they gave it to you. They won't give you another."

She put down the receiver.

Palfrey put his down, too, and moved across the room. It was long and narrow, stretching the whole length of the penthouse, and with magnificent views over London towards both south and east. Even tonight, with so many lights switched off, there was great beauty. The room was furnished in contemporary style, the chairs low and angular but comfortable. In one corner was a twenty-one-inch television set, in another a stereogram boxed in pale brown wood. Near this was a wall cupboard, and he opened it and took out glasses, whisky, brandy and vodka.

"So you two know each other."

"Very well," answered Andromovitch.

"I suppose I shouldn't ask how you met," Palfrey suggested mildly.

"Miss Smith told me she was a newspaper reporter," Andromovitch said. "She was in Moscow earlier this year with a party of models, both men and women. She came especially to study the most popular sizes. She was writing an article on the problem of finding clothes large enough for those who were overweight. Isn't that so, Miss Smith?" Andromovitch's English was very precise, almost pedantic, and entirely free of accent.

She was leaning back with her eyes half-closed.

"Yes," she said. "That's what I told you."

"And after she had left, a number of our people—men and women—began to lose weight, surprisingly fast. I was asked by the Soviet Government to make inquiries. This has taken a long time. I soon discovered she had a forged passport. Two days ago I made the further discovery that she supplied a certain drug, called *Dio*, to the individuals concerned."

"I see," said Palfrey huskily. "Wasn't the drug expensive?"

"Very," Stefan answered.

"Don't say you paid—"

"No one paid money," interrupted Stefan. "All the buyers paid with specific secret information. Two of them have since been relieved of their posts." He stood closer to the girl, and put his great hand on her shoulder. "How many others did you bribe with the drug, Ida? It is important to know, because otherwise everyone in Russia who is overweight will come under suspicion." He glanced round at Palfrey, as he went on: "Everyone, and I mean everyone, in any position of authority in national or local or provincial affairs. Sap, you know the long, slow, burdensome time we have had in Russia, how gradually we are recovering from the mistrust which followed the revolution and the resultant purges. This could put us back a decade—even more. And yet it did not occur to me to consult you at the beginning of the inquiries. I thought it likely to be yet another anti-Russian or anti-Communist trick. The moment I realised you were also in serious trouble here, I came to discuss it."

"We've had serious trouble all right," Palfrey said heavily.

"How much do you know about *Dio*?"

"Not enough," Palfrey said. "Nothing like as much as we are going to know, Ida, do we?"

She looked from one to the other, and her eyes were filled with tears. Her eyes were her only attractive fea-

ure but, even as she sat there, the seductive beauty of er body became apparent.

She said: "I can only tell you what I know."

"It must *be* all you know."

Palfrey poured out drinks at last, giving her a brandy. was very quiet up here, and now that the shocks were ver, the tension had eased. Palfrey sat astraddle an right chair, looking at the girl, Stefan on the long ouch, which was only just large enough for him.

"First," Palfrey said, "what happened today, Ida? hat caused you to fall out with your aunt?"

"I heard what had happened up at the hotel and the boratory," she answered in a low-pitched voice. "It was deous. All those people, killed or maimed, all that de-uction—it was dreadful. I'd never realised before what ey would do. I always believed—believed what Aunt ercia and my father—and the others believed."

"Your father?" asked Palfrey, as if he didn't know."

"I am Ida Dioll, she told him, making no attempt at asion.

Palfrey nodded, and Ida went on:

"We—we have always believed that there are far too any sick and hungry people in the world, that we had reduce the population and to do it we had to control overnments. Oh, I knew what they planned," she went n, bitterly. "I agreed with them. My father discovered *io*, and its side-effects—"

"What are its side-effects?" asked Palfrey.

She looked startled.

"Don't you *know*?"

"Ida," Palfrey said gently, "I had never heard of *Dio* ntil twenty-four hours ago. In fact, it is less than venty-four hours. What *are* the side-effects?"

Ida said flatly: "There are two kinds of *Dio*."

*Dio*-1 and *Dio*-2, Palfrey remembered.

"Yes?"

"One hardens resistance to the emotional and senti mental human attitudes," Ida said. "People virtually change their character. In extreme cases they change from being kindly and gentle to being hard—even cruel —and harsh. My father believes that these characteristics were already in the people but repressed, and the drug brings the primary characteristic out."

She paused.

"Please go on," Stefan Andromovitch said with a courtesy which seemed almost out of place.

"In another form, it makes people obey," she stated simply.

"Obey—what?"

"Orders of those in command of them," she answered.

"You mean they will obey *any* order?"

This was exactly what Mercia had said, so this was in effect confirmation; but Ida may have been instructed to confirm it, so as to convince him of the hopelessness of resisting.

"Yes," she answered. "*Any* order that is given by an authority is accepted. They discover that their sensitivity is deadened, they can tolerate harsh, cruel—even sadistic things. Whenever ordered to do so, they will carry out harsh and cruel punishments, or sentences." She put her right hand to her forehead, and again Palfrey saw tears in her eyes. "I've fought and fought and fought against believing it, but *Dio dehumanises* people. That's exactly what it does. And today I saw what could result from it."

She fell silent, sipped her drink, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and then looked at them with a kind of defiance.

"Ida, you must have realised quite soon what could happen," Palfrey said. "Why didn't you try to do something about it before this?"

She drained her glass and put it down abruptly.

"I didn't do anything about it because I hated *people*," she said tensely. "I hated the whole idiot mass of them

every brute of a man and every bitch of a woman who ever took one look at me and then laughed in my face. *Look at me!*" she cried. "Look at what nature did for *me*. Think what I've lived through. I hated people. I have always hated people." She broke off, and stood up slowly. Moving with a supple grace she turned to the window, speaking over her shoulder in a voice they could hardly hear.

"At least I thought I did. Until today."

## 13

# REPORTS FROM AFAR

Turning back to an easy chair, sinking into it, Ida looked utterly helpless and forlorn. Tears gathered in her eyes and one fell, slowly, pathetically. Palfrey could not rid himself of the feeling that they were made of glycerine, that somehow she had produced tears at will.

"So you thought you hated people," Palfrey said. "What made you stop?"

"When I saw and heard what happened today."

"Were you very near?"

"I heard that something was planned to happen at the hotel, and went to see," she answered. "I might have been right on the spot at the time of the explosion—it was sheer luck that I wasn't."

"Luck?" echoed Andromovitch.

"I was going out earlier, but Aunt Mercia delayed me."

"And you call that luck?" Palfrey said drily. "When did she let you go?"

"After—after the explosion. I couldn't help hearing that, it shook the whole house, but it wasn't until afterwards that I realised we had caused it. I—I nearly went mad. *I tell you I nearly went mad.*" She sat upright in the chair, her voice rising to shrill discord. "I can still hear the screaming. I can see those bodies—those pieces of flesh." She broke off, gasping, staring at Palfrey as if the scene was reflected in his eyes.

"What did you do afterwards?" Palfrey asked.

"Were you alone?" inquired Andromovitch, almost simultaneously.

"One of the men was with me, a man named Steven-

son, who works for them." Them. "I went back to Donegal Square. I was absolutely stunned, just didn't know what to do. I couldn't believe Aunt Mercia had connived at what they had done, but—but she did know. She said she hated it too but she accepted it without question, it was just a new stage in the war we had been waging for years. I argued with her, said I wouldn't have had anything to do with it if I'd dreamed what would happen. She—she—she just laughed at me!"

"Laughed," echoed Palfrey.

"She said, if we'd been doing things like this to men's minds for so long, what did it matter what happened to their bodies?"

Palfrey and Andromovitch exchanged glances, but neither interrupted. The girl leaned right back in her chair, her lovely body so strangely at variance to her face. "I tried to make her go and see for herself, but she wouldn't. A little later she told me you were coming. I said I wanted to see you but she instructed Stevenson and Jones to keep me out of the room—they actually shut me into a cupboard, but I managed to open it. You know what happened after that."

"Yes, I know," said Palfrey. "Did Jones know why you were so upset?"

"Oh, yes!"

"He seemed just a good servant."

"He *is* a good servant," said Ida. "He does exactly what he's told because of the drug called *Dio*-2. It's a by-product of *Dio*." When neither of the others spoke, she went on: "And I thought my father was such a benefactor to mankind! I was so sure he was." She stood up, and Palfrey thought again that he had never seen so ugly a girl, nor one with a more seductive figure. "And in a way I still *do*. But it will have to take much longer than he thinks, you can't kill men and women like this, it's—it's—too awful."

"But you *can* destroy their minds," Palfrey said heavily.

"Dr. Palfrey," Ida said, pleadingly, "just look at the world we live in. Just *look* at it! I've travelled to practically every country, every part of the world. Have *you* seen what's happening? Have you seen India and Pakistan and South America and China? Have you seen the millions of people dying of starvation? Have you—"

She went on and on, as if pouring out her heart.

Palfrey had seen all of these countries and all of these things.

He had travelled in the hinterlands of the earth, shocked and revolted by the human poverty and misery which existed in a world which so many people knew nothing about.

He had agents wherever there were people.

Among the Buddhists of Burma and the Far East, among the Shinto priests of Japan, the priests of South America—among all nations and all races he had agents, working.

These agents sent him reports from time to time of conditions so appalling that it was almost impossible to believe they really existed. An even greater touch of horror was added by the knowledge that in the midst of famine there were those millions who ate too well, and far too much.

Of late, many of these had become thin.

Everywhere on that particular day, agents sent their reports to Palfrey, not by the dozen but by the hundred, and every report said virtually the same thing. Those who had been fat had become lean. And there was a vast range of such men. There were politicians and religious leaders, industrialists and professional men, all of them prominent in their chosen fields. In every government there were some, and many more had the ears of govern-

ments and leaders of nations—like those who were close to the President of the United States.

The lists kept coming in, both names and notes showing a remarkable similarity. Most of the men affected had changed personalities, were harsher and more intolerant, while those who had already been extremist, were now made doubly so.

Reports had come in from seventy-six countries when Palfrey, after hearing Ida's outburst, received a call from Joyce. When she had told him, she said in a very restrained voice:

"So it wasn't wishful thinking, Sap."

"It's gone so far that we might now be unable to stop it," Palfrey said stonily. "What other information do you have about Dioll himself?"

"Not much that we didn't already know," answered Joyce, "but there is one thing you'll hate."

"What's that?" asked Palfrey.

"He knew Harvey-Lee years ago," Joyce told him.

Palfrey went very still, and he lost most of his colour. It was a long time before he said huskily:

"It doesn't matter what I do in this case, it is the wrong thing." He began to play with his hair. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Not about Dioll—except that he lived apart from his wife for years. She died two years ago. Ida used the name Smith when she went into journalism, fresh from Southampton University. She's twenty-four, and a very able journalist according to the reports."

"Are you tracing her family's early history?"

"Yes, of course."

"Let me have it soon as you can," Palfrey said. He put down the receiver and went back to the other room.

Andromovitch and Ida were standing by the window, an amazing contrast in size—the top of her head was inches below his shoulder, and in this low room he had to bend his neck to avoid touching the ceiling.

"Ida," Palfrey said. "Who else sells *Dio*?"

She didn't answer at first.

"It's available in seventy-six countries—"

"Ninety-seven," she corrected, wearily.

"You can't have made all the contacts, surely."

"No, I've only dealt with Europe," she told him. "I don't know who sells in America or the rest of the world, but I do know that it sells everywhere. They have a wonderful organisation."

"Yes," Palfrey said, and asked at last: "Who *are* 'they'?"

"I don't really know," she answered. "My father is among them and so is my uncle."

"Mercia's husband?"

"Yes," Ida answered.

"*Is* he your uncle?"

"Not really, but I've known him ever since I can remember. I believe there is a family relationship but I'm not sure. I know some others who hold high positions, too, but I don't think any of them is actually one of the leaders. They have been very careful not to let me or anyone else know too much about anything," she went on. "There are separate departments which are kept strictly apart from one another. My work has been entirely in the sale of *Dio*-1—the fat reducer."

"Can you give me a list of all your customers?" Palfrey asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Did you have a false passport under the name of Smith?"

"Yes—and I still do. They supplied it."

"Do you know whether there is a distributing centre for *Dio* in each country?"

"I only assume there is," answered Ida. "I knew the one here, but I don't know any others."

"How did you sell this *Dio* drug?"

"I simply took samples and persuaded one or two peo-

ple to take them. The results were always so spectacular that afterwards it wasn't difficult to find others willing to buy—in fact they leapt at the chance," she went on, moving about the room. "It didn't matter what the cost, they were always prepared to pay." She looked at Andromovitch. "You know what they were prepared to pay in Moscow."

He nodded gravely.

"How did you supply the *Dio*, once you had the orders?" asked Palfrey.

"I simply don't know," she answered. "I passed the orders on to Aunt Mercia or my father, and—" she broke off.

"And what?"

"For every new customer I received a commission of a hundred pounds," she said. "That makes me very rich, doesn't it?"

"Where does the money come from?"

"Profits, I think," Ida answered. "There's never been any shortage."

That was exactly what her aunt had said; money was no object at all.

"Do you know how this began?" asked Palfrey.

"I'm not really sure," Ida stated, "but I think it was in Africa. About seven years ago, before I was at the University and he had the Chair, my father took a year's sabbatical, and went to Liberia. That was really why he and my mother separated. She loved to stay in England and hated hot weather. I spent a few weeks with him during the vacation. He did some digging under the sea, with a team of divers. They went down very deep in the ocean around the coast, and brought up specimens which he examined in the laboratory. I didn't know what he'd found, but he didn't go back to the University. Someone financed him with his own laboratory—certainly he became very rich. I knew he was a great believer in the nu-

tritional value of plankton and other sea life, and wondered if he had made some big discovery which would help the world food problem."

All the time she spoke, she was moving about. Quite quickly Palfrey lost his awareness of her ugly mouth and big teeth, her jutting eyebrows and her receding chin. She talked as if she were dictating, and once or twice it occurred to him that she also talked as if she were reciting something she had learned off by heart. She was saying, too, what he already knew about her father, giving nothing away.

Was she, could she be doing, what she had been told —telling them only as much as "they" wanted Z5 to know? The possibility was at the back of Palfrey's mind all the time he listened, and yet it did not distract him from the story.

"So your father was interested in world food problems," Andromovitch remarked without expression.

Ida came to a standstill, in front of them both.

"He still is. He *is* a great humanitarian. He became involved in this simply because he hated the conditions in which people lived. I—I learned later about *Dio*. He had been very overweight, and eating fish from a place where he was investigating, he lost weight very quickly. So did two overweight native women. I didn't know at the time but I know now that he had discovered *Dio*, in the rocks and ocean bed—at a certain spot. He came to believe that it would be better if half the people of the world lived properly and were well-fed, than for so many to live in the misery they do today. Daddy *believes* that," she insisted. "And so do I."

Palfrey said: "It's easy to believe."

She flushed.

"Do *you* believe it?"

"I've thought a lot about it."

"They think you do—they believe you will help."

"Who told you that?"

"Aunt Mercia—and my father, as well. They have the ighest opinion of you."

"Oh," said Palfrey, and his hand strayed to his hair. Then in a very quiet voice, he went on: "Why is your ncle Victor so frightened of being seen? What is there n his appearance which makes him hide from everyody?"

After a long pause, Ida answered, "I don't know. I've ever seen him."

"Never seen your adopted uncle, although you talk as you know him well?" asked Palfrey incredulously.

"My father has talked about him, Aunt Mercia talks a reat deal. I've often spoken to him on the telephone, but —I've never seen him," Ida asserted. "I—I've always een made to understand that if his identity were known would make difficulties, but I know that's all very ague. I can't help it. I've never seen him, I can't even rove he exists!"

Did Victor Harvey-Lee exist? wondered Palfrey.

And he could see from Stefan's expression that the ussian was asking himself the same question. But there as no point in forcing this, so he asked quietly: "When as their attention first directed towards me?"

"A long time ago," answered Ida. "They were worried hen you showed an interest in my father—that must ave been nearly a year ago, mustn't it?"

"Ten months," answered Palfrey.

"They knew you were interested because apparently ou made some inquiries about Daddy at the Depart- ent of Under-Seas Investigation and Research. One of ur first supporters was the assistant director, he was *ery* fat." Ida actually smiled, and Palfrey had a swift ental picture of the man with whom he had talked at e D.U.S.I.R. officers. The department was little known, ost of its work was secret, and nothing said there by lfrey or anyone in authority should have been passed

on. He felt a sharp spasm of alarm. If the influence o
*Dio* had penetrated so deeply so long ago, how deeply
and widespread was it now? "They watched you very
carefully—one of my jobs was to prepare a memoran
dum on you, a kind of dossier. And it wasn't difficult, be
cause so much of what Z5 has done is known. Do you
know, Dr. Palfrey, there's a complete record of *what* you
have done but hardly anything is known about how you
do it. They still don't know what started you inquiring
about Daddy, for instance."

"Don't they?" asked Palfrey, disarmingly.

She laughed, a little too loudly.

"I know that two or three men were spying on them
and they thought they were your agents. It didn't seem
to matter when I was told they had been killed, but—
well, it certainly does, now." She paused, and then went
on: "Well, two things became obvious, very quickly.
First, that the governments all trusted you, not one of
them had a thing against you, and I think they all con
tribute towards Z5's cost."

"That I can tell you," Palfrey said. "They do."

"The second thing was that no one knows how many
agents you have. We found some among the fat men
who told us they worked for you, but they didn't really
tell us much, except how to send messages to you. And
as you have variations in your codes and your radio
wave-length on reception and transmission from place to
place, we are never up to date. As a matter of fact,
though—"

Again, Ida broke off.

Again, Palfrey found himself wondering whether she
was reciting all she had been told, whether the whole
Ida affair had been staged so that "they" could make yet
another approach to him. Obviously, everything she now
said gave cause for anxiety. If every man on Z5's list of
agents who had been even slightly overweight had de
fected to them, there would be grave gaps in the infor

ation he was getting; he could not trust reports from ny such men.

Stefan Andromovitch, stirring restlessly, obviously saw ne situation as clearly as Palfrey.

Ida went on, in a firm voice: "As a matter of fact they ways believed—or so I understand—that they needed ne co-operation of a man whom all the different nations usted. There were only two possibilities—the Secre-ry-General of the United Nations Organization, and ou."

She paused.

"I know they would much prefer you, as you are sub-ct in the same way to political pressure groups. I can ll you another thing, Dr. Palfrey. The only reason you e alive is that they hope to persuade you to join them. they ever become convinced that you won't, they will ll you."

She paused again, long enough for that to sink in, then rned to Andromovitch, saying:

"The same applies to you, because they know you are cond-in-command. And I'm quite sure they mean what ey say."

## 14

# PALFREY AND ANDROMOVITCH

Ida's voice echoed about the room and the words seeme to rebound off every window and every wall, the loude because there was no other sound. Two sentences re mained sharp and clear in Palfrey's mind; and he knew they must have an equal significance in Stefan's.

*"If ever they become convinced that you won't wor with them, they will kill you . . . And I am quite sur they mean what they say."*

*". . . they will kill you . . . mean what they say."*

*". . . kill you . . . they say."*

*"Kill you, kill you, kill you."*

It no longer mattered whether Ida had been sent her to tell him this, or whether her escape from Doneg Square had been genuine. All that mattered was whethe "they" meant what they said—and the explosion, only mile away, left that in no doubt at all.

Palfrey thought, bleakly: If it's true, then it's up to St fan and me.

He knew that it was true.

He moved closer to the girl, but before he reached h there was a buzzing sound, and Joyce's voice came fro the speaker, subdued but very matter of fact.

"Sap, Mrs. Harvey-Lee is on the telephone, asking f you."

"Tell her I'll call her back," Palfrey said.

"She said it is a matter of extreme urgency." Joy would not have spoken again unless she felt quite su that it was.

"Take a message," Palfrey ordered.

"She refuses to give me a message."

Palfrey raised his voice.

"Tell her either to leave a message or wait until I call back—I may be twenty minutes." He turned away from the wall, and the loudspeaker clicked off. He went to Ida, and took her hands.

"I want you to go back to your aunt," he said. "With a message from me."

"Go *back!*" Ida gasped. "But she will kill me!"

"I want you to give her a message which no one else can."

"No," Ida said in a choking voice. "You can't expect me to go back. I came away with you, I deserted, and they kill all deserters."

"They can consider you an emissary," Palfrey said.

"But they won't!" Ida cried. "I know them too well—they'll kill me!"

He felt sure, now, that she believed what she said, and that he could believe all she had told him—or at least he was as nearly sure as he could be. He moved away from her as Andromovitch asked in his quiet voice:

"What message can she give to her aunt, Sap?"

"She can tell them exactly what she told me," said Palfrey. "She can tell them that you were here, and she can tell them what answer we gave."

"Answer?" exclaimed Ida. "You haven't said a word!"

"But I'm going to," said Palfrey. "I want a week in which to make up my mind about joining with you."

"They'll never agree to waiting!"

"It depends how badly they want me," said Palfrey, glancing at Stefan. "And on how much they want Mr. Andromovitch."

"You can tell them yourselves," Ida said desperately. "I can't go back, I can't let them kill me."

"It could save thousands of lives," Andromovitch reasoned, "and it might prevent the disaster which you now threatens the world." There was great appeal in his

simplicity, an appeal which showed in the expression o his grey eyes. "Go back and tell your aunt, Ida."

She turned round, crying: "But I can't do it! I'm to frightened. It's no use, you'll have to tell her yourself! Wildly, she went on: "She wants to talk to Dr. Palfrey You've promised to ring her back. It can't make any dif ference who tells her. Anyhow it will be a waste of time they would never give you a week's grace. Don't you un derstand? If you don't work with them, they'll kill you. When neither of the men responded, she raised her voic to a screaming pitch. "Haven't you any sense at all Don't you realise that they've been working towards thi for years? They would never give up now. They've sur rounded themselves with men who will do exactly wha they're told, who take drugs which make them *dedicate* to obeying orders. They never give anyone a secon chance." She was shouting at Palfrey, and suddenly flun herself towards Andromovitch, taking him so much b surprise that he yielded a few inches. She flung her arm round him and pressed against his gigantic body. Sh looked like a child—a daughter, seeking safety in her fa ther's arms.

And she began to cry, uncontrollably.

Palfrey said: "I'll talk to her aunt." He moved toward the telephone, adding: "You know what this means a well as I do, Stefan."

"It means if there's a hope, it's with you and me," Ste fan replied.

"That's it," agreed Palfrey. He pressed for Joyce, an when she answered, said: "I'll talk to Mrs. Harvey-Le now." He sounded as matter of fact as if he were sayin he would take a social or a business call.

"Hold on," Joyce said.

"How are the reports coming in?"

"We've had ten more," she answered. "They all sa much the same thing." There was a pause, and he coul

ar the number ringing. Over the dialing tone, Joyce nt on: "I've made a rough total."

"How many men are involved?" asked Palfrey.

"At least four thousand," Joyce told him.

"And we've only touched the fringe," Palfrey said. His ght hand strayed to his hair, and he was quiet for a ng time. "Joyce—"

"Yes, Sap." Her voice was still muted, she was obvisly very low in spirit.

"They know the names of practically all of our agents," lfrey told her.

"I gathered so. What are we going—" Joyce broke off, n burst out in a manner that reminded him vividly of a. "Sap, my darling, what are we going to *do*? They ow everything, they know everyone who matters in Z5. ey've infiltrated into every government department in ery nation, in the armies and navies, in industry and mmerce. It's terrifying. 'They' have men in the nuclear earch stations and in the space research stations, here d in America and Russia—they're everywhere. What e we going to *do*?"

Mercia Harvey-Lee spoke in a very practical and calm y.

That's very simple—you're going to co-operate with aren't you, Dr. Palfrey?" Joyce gasped and Mercia ve a little, amused chuckle. "You see, even your rekably efficient young woman forgets that she has a l in for me, and that I can hear what you are saying. Palfrey, if you will carry out my instructions carefly, I can arrange for you to meet my associates. And if u will do exactly what I tell you then my niece may ely return and nothing will happen to her."

'And what do you want me to do?" asked Palfrey, as etly.

Inform the British Prime Minister, the President of United States, the Chairman of the Soviet Praesid-

ium and the President of the Chinese Republic the exact situation, and arrange for them to meet with the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organisation within the next seventy-two hours. The *venue* will be decided later."

Without another word, she rang off.

Palfrey put the receiver down and leaned against the wall. He could hear Joyce's short, laboured breathing. She had left the line open, proof of how strung up she was, but it didn't matter. He was trying to think of any chink in "their" armour but he could not. If he made the arrangements with the leaders of the big nations, "they" would know. If he didn't, "they" would know.

"Joyce, send up the tape of that, will you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is there any word from Duros?"

"There's nothing in that I haven't told you," Joyce answered. "But I've noticed one thing I should have looked out for—we've had no reports recently from our own overweight agents."

"No." Palfrey gave a strangled laugh. "It's a good thing you're not fat!"

"Or you, or Stefan," Joyce said. "Do you think we can rely—"

"Stop!" Palfrey said sharply, and then he added, more gently: "We can't rely on anyone. Don't let's fool ourselves. There is the by-product called *Dio*-2 which might affect the lean and the short and the tall, as well as the fat. Let me have that tape." He rang off, and went into the other room. This time Stefan was sitting on the couch and Ida was standing at the spot she favoured by the window. By chance, her head made a silhouette against the pale floodlighting of St. Paul's.

"What did she want?" she asked flatly.

"To give me orders," Palfrey said. "And—" he broke off. "But you can hear for yourself." He poured out more drinks automatically, as he might have done under a

death sentence. Within five minutes, the tape was brought in. He put it on the play-back spools and they gathered around and listened. Ida's face was set. In repose like this, with her lips closed over her teeth, she looked very simian. She was obviously acutely conscious of it, and whenever he glanced at her she turned quickly away.

As the spools played on, however, she became more and more relaxed until at last, as her aunt said: ". . . my niece may safely return and nothing will happen to her," she spun round in a pirouette as if suddenly on top of the world. She could hardly contain herself when the tape finished, and she burst out:

"You are going to do what they want, aren't you? You *are.*"

"Yes, I am," Palfrey said, without hesitation.

"Thank God for that!" she cried. "I can go back, I won't be killed!" She actually clapped her hands together. "Sap, when can I go?"

She hadn't called him "Sap" before. She had never looked like this before, gay and light-hearted, and he watched her with speculative interest. She must have been absolutely convinced that her days were numbered, surely nothing else could possibly explain such relief.

He made himself say: "In spite of what you saw tonight, you want to go back?"

"Of course I do," she said. "It was horrible, I shall have nightmares about it, but it doesn't matter so much now. It's over and done with."

"But it could happen again."

"Of course it won't happen again," said Ida, almost indignantly. "You're going to do what they tell you. There won't be any danger now."

Ten minutes later, Palfrey went down to the main lobby with her, and put her in the car which had been waiting for him. It was so cold that he was almost frozen stiff, and it was an effort to run back into the hotel. This

time he went downstairs to the headquarters, knowing that Stefan would be down there already.

Two agents, men he had known for years, passed him —and one smiled and raised a hand, the other said formally: "Good evening, sir." There was nothing the matter with that, but something in the man's manner puzzled him. Two days ago he would have put down the unusual formality to a mood, indigestion or irritation over some trifle, but tonight he thought of something very different.

The man was Cartwright, and Cartwright had always run to fat.

Now, he was as lean as a whippet—and his change of manner might well have been caused by the *Dio* drug. If there had been time, Palfrey would have checked all suspect agents, but that must come later: the crisis was upon him now.

Palfrey turned into the Operations Room.

This was comparatively new, changed ever since this new underground H.Q. had been built. It was now believed to be absolutely impregnable. It was much larger than the Information Room at Scotland Yard, and much of it was operated by computers. One whole wall was an enormous panel showing where agents were operating at that moment—red, in action, green, on no specific assignment. The lights were little more than pin points; every agent on Z5's books, including men who were full-time employees of governments, industry, the professions and commerce, was here.

There were over ten thousand men: it was a small army.

There were over four thousand *known* men also agents of "them"—and there in fact might well be two or three times as many.

Palfrey's mouth felt dry, and he had never been more aware of danger.

The three women and two men who were controlling the panel and sorting out the reports as they came in,

watched him intently. He remembered with a shock that only a few weeks before, one of them, Emily Townsend, had been complaining about her weight, and hating the fact that she would have to go on a diet.

She wasn't overweight now.

Several offices led off the main operations room, and the walls were of glass, so that the controllers could judge the volume of reports which were coming in. Joyce's office was one of these, in a corner with a door leading into the passage, not far from Palfrey's. One wall of her room, also, was a huge control board. Here, the analysis of reports were recorded, but instead of pin points of light there were illuminated numerals. Joyce was standing by one of the telephones, watching numbers spring up on the board. She turned to Palfrey.

"It's over five thousand, now."

"So I gather." He smiled at her, in his rather vague way. There were times when he looked far too vague to have achieved what he had, when his expression was almost vacant and strangers, seeing him, would simply relegate him to the unimportant or the insignificant. He put an arm round Joyce's shoulders and gave her a reassuring squeeze.

"We can't say a word and be sure it isn't passed on," she said. "That's why you stopped me on the telephone, isn't it?"

"Yes," Palfrey answered.

She clenched her fists, as if she were going to hit him.

"It's absolutely impossible! I can't *think*, I'm so worried. I even do routine things wrong."

"Well, don't do this wrong," Palfrey said. "Get Debrett for me and ask him what time I can see the Prime Minister."

"In the morning?"

"Of course not. Tonight."

"But it's so late—" Joyce began, and then broke off.

"I'm sorry, Sap. I know what it's like to be watched all the time, now."

She looked at the window and saw Emily Townsend glancing round at her.

Palfrey patted her shoulder, and then went out. He opened the door of his own office, and found Stefan sitting in an armchair, a tea tray by his side. Stefan was stretched out in an unfamiliar pose, legs almost touching Palfrey's desk, elbows resting on the arms of the chair which had been specially made for him. His eyes were closed, he was breathing very softly. Palfrey smiled faintly; it was characteristic of Stefan Andromovitch that he could relax so completely at a time of such tension: he, Palfrey, could do the same and wake completely refreshed and able to face the problems with a clear mind.

He did not, now; he just sat at his desk, staring at the curtains which shut out the artificial sunlight.

There were so many things he ought to do before he contemplated resting. Stefan must have been exhausted by the journey, although with the latest Russian Red Star jets the flight was under three hours. Had he fallen asleep? He would have been as acutely aware as he, Palfrey, of the need for discussing the situation and making a decision. It wasn't like him to drop off.

Palfrey went very still, and felt fear, cold, aching fear, creep through his body. *Was* Stefan asleep? Or had he become a victim of "them" since arriving here?

# 15

# SLEEP?

Palfrey rounded his desk and approached Stefan, studying the big man's lips and chest. He could see no sign of breathing and hear no sound. He felt choked. There was no person in the world who meant so much to him. For nearly thirty years they had worked together, forming a mutual liking and trust which nothing had broken and nothing had seriously challenged. They had worked together throughout most of the Second World War, in Allied Intelligence, afterwards in the bitter hostility of the cold war days when virtually no one in the West had trusted any Russian, least of all one whose loyalty was still to Moscow, and when everyone east of the Iron Curtain had seen all Westerners as monsters. Between them they had built a bridge between East and West which had never collapsed. Sometimes it had been so flimsy and fragile that it had been a deadly danger to cross it, but now it was as solid as the bridges across the Hudson River or the Thames, the Seine or the Moscva. Among those things built on the bridge was the hot-line from Washington to the Kremlin. Only the leaders of nations knew how much Z5 had played in the gradual establishing of confidence among nations, and so to the precarious yet positive peace of the world.

Palfrey stood in front of his friend: afraid.

Close though he was, he could see no sign of breathing, but he had never seen Stefan more at peace, although he was a man who was always remarkably relaxed, who seldom showed anger, excitement or any kind of emotion. His complexion, slightly tanned as if from ex-

posure to sun on high mountains, was remarkably good. He had great delicacy of feature despite his size. Both hands now rested on the arms of his chair; they were well-shaped, very masculine hands and yet, Palfrey knew, in life capable of rare gentleness.

In life.

*Could* he be dead?

Only half an hour before Palfrey had seen and talked with him. Except on the first few minutes of greeting he had said very little; but that was their way, to accept each other's presence and to take up their relationship after a long gap, as if there had been no gap at all. This huge man had the ability to fade into the background; to be in a room and yet be forgotten. In a way, he was like Duros. It was an absurd thought, and yet there was truth in it.

Palfrey pushed back the sleeve of his jacket and felt for the pulse. Was it beating? Still almost sick with anxiety, he began to feel another emotion—rage. If they had killed Stefan, then my God he would not rest a moment until he had killed them, until—

He broke off.

He was powerless, and the sooner he realised it the better. If "they" could do such a thing as this to Stefan there was no way in which he could strike back; he was as impotent as any of the people who had been blasted to death in the afternoon.

He could detect no sign of breathing.

He took a small shaving mirror from the drawer of his desk, and held it in front of Stefan's lips, which looked as if they had been carved from pink stone. He held his breath as he watched, but could see no sign of mist, nothing to suggest that Stefan was alive.

Slowly, Palfrey turned away.

He sat on the edge of the desk, staring at his friend. He could not believe this and yet there was the evidence of all his senses. It couldn't be true but it seemed to be

true; and if it was, if "they" had managed to murder Stefan, then that meant they could just as easily murder him, Palfrey.

In that moment, it did not seem to matter. His body felt numb and chilled, although this room was always kept at a temperature of 69 degrees. He seemed, since he had realised there was something strange about Stefan, to be moving and thinking at half pressure.

Could this be due to a drug?

He hadn't hesitated to eat and drink with Mercia Harvey-Lee, partly because he had known that if "they" really wanted him dead, there was nothing to prevent them from killing him. But if they had brain-washed him—

They had not, or he would not be thinking like this. He rang for Joyce, but she didn't answer at once. He moved across to Stefan and checked with the same result, then rang again for Joyce. She still didn't answer and no one answered for her, which was most unusual. He strode out of the room and went to her office: she was leaning against the desk, a hand at her forehead—as if sleeping.

"Oh, my God!" Palfrey exclaimed.

He moved towards the Operations Room. Everything there seemed normal, the pin points of coloured lights were glowing on and off, while the computer did its work, and Emily Townsend stood in front of the huge panel. He went through into the office of Billitter, his second-in-command, who had to be on duty at such a time of emergency.

He was slumped in his chair as if asleep.

Palfrey backed out of the office, and stood for a few moments, absolutely still. Becoming aware of someone approaching, he turned round slowly. Emily Townsend was close behind him, smiling faintly. She wore horn-rimmed glasses with slightly tinted lenses which dimmed the brightness of her eyes. He saw how much

thinner she was, how much healthier. She had always been a lively, jolly type, laughing rather than smiling in her present rather sardonic way.

"There is a telephone call for you."

"From whom?"

"A Miss Smith," she answered.

"Ida." He half-turned, and then realised that from the moment he had seen Joyce, he had forgotten Stefan. He swung back. "Is Dr. Menzies in?"

"I think so," Emily Towsend said, "But I think you might be advised to talk to Miss Smith first."

Palfrey said softly: "So you do. I'll take the call in Joyce's room." He went in, looking at Joyce as he picked up the receiver. She, like Stefan, seemed completely relaxed, all the lines of tension and anxiety had been smoothed from her face. She had dark lashes which matched her hair, and they swept upwards most attractively.

"This is Dr. Palfrey," he said.

"Oh, Sap!" It was Ida, and she sounded light-hearted, quite free from fear. "Aunt Mercia asked me to call you. She's gone to bed. There's no need to worry about your giant friend *or* Joyce Morgan. They had a drug in some tea and they'll be in a coma for a few hours, but nothing will happen to them, Aunt Mercia promises, if you do what you've been told to do." She paused, and he could picture her pursing those thick ugly lips over her big teeth. "But if you don't, they won't wake."

Palfrey said: "So they won't. You seem very pleased about that, Ida."

"Sap, I'm all right now, I've fully recovered. And once you begin to see the tremendous benefits of what they're trying to do, you'll feel fine, too. Sap—"

"Yes?"

"You're very kind and very sweet," Ida Smith said. "Don't take any chances, *please*."

She rang off, without another word. Palfrey put the re-

ceiver down very slowly, became aware of Emily Townsend watching him, and thought, idly, she looks much more attractive. She was. Instead of being too full-bosomed, and almost barrel-waisted, she had a good figure, and did not appear to be as tightly corseted.

The telephone bell buzzed, and he lifted it.

"Dr. Palfrey." This was Debrett, the Prime Minister's personal *aide*. "Mr. Hall will be glad to see you at any time, if you will come to Number 10."

"Good," said Palfrey. "I'll be there in half an hour."

He rang off, hand at his forehead, wondering: Good? What can possibly be good about it? He was being forced to do exactly what "they" wanted, and the Rt. Hon. Reginald Hall, Prime Minister of Great Britain, was virtually doing the same.

How many men who worked for "them" were in the Prime Minister's circle?

Palfrey didn't know, and it did not seem greatly to matter. This had gone far beyond the normal gathering of information. Whether there were two men or ten at Downing Street, they had a stranglehold.

Palfrey went into the Operations Room, and said:

"I'm going to see the Prime Minister."

Emily said: "I'll look after things here until you're back."

She gave her new kind of smile, while Palfrey reflected sardonically that though, until a short while ago she would have carried out any order well enough, she would not have had the slightest aptitude to assume command. His car was waiting. They drove very slowly over roads which were sheets of ice. As they rounded Trafalgar Square and turned towards Whitehall, the snow-covered roofs and the snowdrifts in windows and doorways gave it a beauty he had never even suspected. The car turned into Downing Street, and immediately two policemen emerged from a doorway.

"Dr. Palfrey?"

"Yes," Palfrey said, and was allowed to pass.

The door of Number 10 opened at once; either the police had given a signal, or someone was watching from inside. It struck very warm as a footman closed the door. Debrett came hurrying. His usual calm was broken, he was flustered and alarmed, but he didn't say anything of consequence as he opened a door and announced:

"Dr. Palfrey, sir."

"Ah, yes," said the Rt. Hon. Reginald Hall. "Come in, Palfrey."

Hall was sitting in front of a blazing fire, with papers placed tidily on a low table next to him, and brandy at his side. A light shining from the mantelpiece on to the papers, left his head and face in shadow. He half rose from his chair.

"Sit down," he invited, and Palfrey contrasted his calm with Debrett's obvious agitation. He had a fine speaking voice, and was as handsome as a film star, tall, lean, with a good head of nearly white hair. He shook hands. "I'm sorry I can't get up with comfort—touch of lumbago, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir."

"It comes and goes." Hall's face seemed to become more lined and yet to give a great impression of strength, as he went on: "You have disturbing news, I gather."

"Disturbing is an understatement, sir."

"I am fond of understatements," observed the Prime Minister. "They keep the blood pressure nearer to normal." He motioned to the brandy. "Will you—"

"No, thank you," Palfrey said, almost brusquely. "Prime Minister, the situation could hardly be more grave."

"You mean, in the sense that we are quite powerless to save ourselves from being taken over," Hall said quietly. "So I understand."

"Where did you get the information, sir?"

"From two members of the Cabinet," Hall answered. Very slowly, he went on: "They have been colleagues of mine for a long time, and both of them were very much too heavy only a few months ago." He paused, to allow the significance of that to sink in, before going on: "I understand you have a message for me."

"Yes, sir. I'm asked if you will be in readiness to attend a Summit Conference in about seventy hours from now."

"I will indeed," said Hall. "Do you know where it is to be held?"

"Not yet," Palfrey said.

"They are determined to make their power felt," Hall remarked, showing a touch of bitterness for the first time.

"You appear to take it very calmly, sir."

Hall spread his hands in front of the fire.

"Can you suggest any way in which it would help if I were to become agitated?"

"No," Palfrey said. "No, sir." He glanced towards the brandy. "May I change my mind?"

"Eh? Oh, of course. Hugh, brandy for Dr. Palfrey." The Prime Minister picked up his own glass. "Dr. Palfrey," he went on, "you know that I am fairly new to this position of eminence, but I am not new in the ways of the world, and I am not a young man. I have seen two world wars, the massacre of millions, the death of incalculable numbers of people due to starvation and sickness. And I will tell you that I see little or no hope for the world as it is today."

Palfrey sat still; suddenly, awfully appalled.

"I was made a stop-gap Prime Minister because our policies have failed, our economy is weaker than it has ever been, more taxation and other burdens are unavoidable if we go on as we are. We can't go on, Palfrey, and survive with any substance as a great nation. I am not particularly sanguine about the state of the

world, either. If there *is* a way of improving the situation, no matter how drastic a way, then we should at least consider it."

Debrett handed Palfrey a glass, in an unsteady hand. Palfrey watched the brandy tilting up and down.

"Is this the attitude of your Cabinet, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, some want to defy this new force," said Hall. "There are always those among us who are foolhardy."

"But the majority?"

"Palfrey," said Hall, "it has been a very long fight, and few of us see any way of coming out victors. I am going to this Summit Conference. I had already considered the advisability of proposing one, and I know that leaders of other countries also felt the need to try to find a compromise in the present situation."

The bouquet of the brandy mounted seductively. Palfrey sat further back in his chair. He felt a surging rage greater than he had ever experienced—but he was aware of an awful hopelessness, too. If he were to argue, then it would be reported to "them" and they would know that he was not yet won over.

The old man's face was showing more clearly as Palfrey grew accustomed to the light. The lines engraved there, the tiredness, the readiness to give up, all these were clearly seen in his features. He was smiling a deprecating kind of smile, as if half-guessing what Palfrey was thinking, while feeling superior to or aloof from it. "The question is, what are *you* going to do?" asked Hall. "You have a great deal more power and influence than I, and I am sure you would be of much more importance to this new world."

Palfrey didn't speak.

"Palfrey," said Hall, softly, "don't fight this enemy. Don't sit there raging at me. Admit defeat. It has been, it *is* a war which we did not know was being fought. You bear more responsibility for our ignorance than most. It was happening all over the world and your territory is

he world, but it took you completely by surprise. It was masterly strategy, and it won. You must admit that, Palfrey. You must co-operate with them. If you don't, a great many terrible things could happen."

He fell silent.

The only movement was the shifting of coal as a red mass caved in. Above it rose the sound of Debrett's heavy breathing. Strangely laboured breathing, Palfrey thought, but he was concentrating on his self-control, exerting all his nervous energy on restraining his temper. He had never been more like losing it, and he knew that an outburst would do no good at all.

He made himself say: "So you don't think Britain has a part to play in the future, sir?"

"I think we are old and tired as a nation, as I am as a man," declared Hall. "You've always been a believer in world unity, in world action, and here is a chance you will never have again. Nations as nations no longer matter. Only people matter."

He stopped.

Palfrey found himself saying in a voice he hardly recognised as his own: "I have never believed more in people, sir, nor believed more that the British people would rather die fighting this horror than live for ever with their minds controlled and corrupted. They would rather be half-starved with free minds, then well-fed and in chains."

"Palfrey, you are a sickly sentimentalist," Hall rebuked. "This is a time for realism."

"This is a time for traitors like you to die," Debrett said from the far side of the room.

There was such hatred in his voice that Palfrey turned, startled, and Hall twisted his head round to look in astonishment at the young man who had been silent for so long.

Debrett had a pistol in his hand.

"For God's sake don't!" cried Palfrey. As he sprang up,

brandy exploding in the fire, glass smashing with a sharp report, both sounds merged into the crack of a shot. Even as he moved, he knew that he was too late to prevent this new, appalling horror.

The Right Honourable Reginald Hall, M.P., P.C., C.V.O., slumped forward in his chair. There was a small, bloodless hole in the middle of his forehead.

# 16

# DEBRETT

The Prime Minister fell forward, his head bathed in firelight. Palfrey moved swiftly towards him and gently raised him up, but the slack lips and eyes told their tale too well. Debrett drew near, the gun still in his hands.

"Is he dead?" he asked harshly.

Palfrey's hand was on the old man's pulse. He glanced round and said:

"I think so. Send for a doctor and get out."

"You *are* a doctor!"

Palfrey didn't speak, but felt the warm wrist and the stillness within it. He stood up, looking dispassionately at Debrett, all the passion drained out of him.

"Get out," he said, and took a key from his pocket. "Go and wait at this place."

"He was a traitor!" Debrett did not take nor even look at the key.

"And you are a murderer," Palfrey said.

"He would have acquiesced in the murder of millions. By God, so would *you*. You're as bad as he is," Debrett cried, and his eyes glittered fanatically in the firelight. "You didn't mean what you said. Why, you—"

He raised the gun.

Palfrey stood upright, facing him, making no attempt to push the gun aside or to move. He did not speak, but waited, and in those few seconds he felt almost as if death would be welcome. At last he spoke in a quiet, dispassionate voice.

"I meant every word I said, and you know it. What difference is there between cold-blooded killers?" When

Debrett didn't answer and yet did not press the trigge
he went on: "The Prime Minister was old and worn ou
but he and his generation fought for what they believe
in a lot harder than you and yours have ever fought."

He expected sounds from outside the room, but ther
was only silence, and the door did not open. Was it pos
sible that the Prime Minister's detectives had not hear
the shot? Knowing that Palfrey had been with Hall an
a trusted *aide*, they may have felt that there was no pos
sibility of danger.

"What are you going to *do*?" breathed Debrett.

"I am going to send for the police and tell them wha
happened," Palfrey said. "If you're still here, you'll be i
a prison cell within the hour. I'm going to talk to th
Deputy Prime Minister and tell him why you killed Hal
And I'm going to arrange the summit meeting. Only afte
that will I know if anything can be done."

"You're—you're playing with words!"

"Shut up!" Palfrey said roughly. "Get out and wait t
see if you ever get a chance to die for your country an
for what you say you believe in. *Any*body can kill for it
He held the key out again.

"You mean you might have something for me to do
Debrett gasped.

"I might have," Palfrey said coldly. "Even for you."

Slowly, Debrett took the key. He glanced down at
and saw the address, on a small circular tab. He read
aloud.

"41, Fulbright Mews, West Kensington. What—wha
shall I do when I get there?"

"Wait," Palfrey said. "Wait—and if you have an
heart, pray."

Debrett glanced down at the body of the man he ha
killed, slid the key into his pocket and moved silently t
wards the door. As it shut behind him, Palfrey heard hi
speak to someone there. Footsteps sounded faintly; aft
what seemed a long time, a door closed.

This room was very quiet.

Palfrey moved across to the telephone, close to the dead man's chair. He knew the telephone number of the Deputy Prime Minister, whose name was Martindale, a younger man and a good politician but not renowned as one of high moral courage. There was only a short pause before the call was answered by a woman. A moment later, Martindale spoke in his rather haughty voice.

All haughtiness disappeared as he heard what Palfrey had to say, and when he spoke it was in an unhurried but very positive way.

"You were quite right to do nothing to cause alarm. At this juncture it would be most unwise. I will come at once, please wait for me. You say Debrett escaped?"

"Yes."

"And no one else knows?"

"No one, yet."

"I will arrange for Dr. Forrester to come," Martindale said. "And a nurse, of course. You may safely leave the matter in my hands, Palfrey. I have no doubt that my colleagues will wish me to take over. I will call an emergency meeting and make all the necessary arrangements."

"Mr. Deputy Prime Minister," Palfrey said clearly. "I believe there will be a summit meeting within the next seventy-two hours, and Britain will have to be represented."

"Yes, indeed," said Martindale. "At such a time of crisis . . . I have *every* confidence in you, Palfrey, and will be grateful for your guidance."

Martindale was a frightened man and would prove just as compliant as Hall had been, Palfrey told himself. He went into the passage, where one of the detectives came forward, and said:

"How is the P.M., sir?"

"Mr. Martindale will be here in half an hour," Palfrey

said. "Don't allow anyone into the room until he arrives." He went out, a gust of wind striking so savagely that it snatched the door out of his hand. He stepped across to his car and got in, and when he sat back he felt as if all the strength had been drained out of his body. He was hardly aware of being driven back along Whitehall, and when they reached the Elite Hotel he saw where they were with a shock of surprise. He got out and went to the lift: as far as he could judge, all of the men in sight were Z5 agents but it was a simple fact that he did not know of anyone whom he could trust absolutely. He went downstairs. Joyce and Stefan were exactly as he had left them, but another assistant was in the Operations Room, and Emily Townsend was in Joyce's.

"So you've taken over," Palfrey said heavily.

"Someone had to, Sap," Emily replied.

"Yes," Palfrey said. "I suppose so. Are you wholeheartedly with 'them'?"

She did not hesitate for a second, before answering:

"Yes, I am. One is either for, or against. They brook no half-measures. I hope you aren't doubtful about your loyalties."

"Doubtful?" Palfrey echoed. "My loyalties don't come into this. We seem to have lost a war. Can you get me the President of the United States, and after I've talked to him, the First Secretary in Peking? And if Stefan is still unconscious, get me Moscow after that."

"It will be a pleasure," Emily said.

"I understand fully," the President said, "and I have a clear idea of the position, Palfrey. I will be glad to attend the summit meeting."

"His Excellency is aware of the situation," declared the First Secretary. "He will hold himself available for a meeting and will attend if he is convinced it is in the best interests of the Republic of China."

"The Chairman of the Praesidium will attend provided the others will attend, and provided he is given sufficient time to prepare," the Secretary in Moscow said. "He will wish to know why Comrade Andromovitch did not make this request, Dr. Palfrey?"

"He is engaged on other urgent work," Palfrey answered.

"I will explain to the Chairman," the Secretary promised.

Palfrey went into his own office, where Stefan, though still unconscious, looked as if he had moved in his coma. Palfrey sat and watched for a few minutes. He was tired out, and yet knew that if he went to bed he would get no sleep. He could hardly credit what had happened, the meekness, almost the humility, with which the world leaders acquiesced. They were like Hall—already conditioned, knowing exactly what to expect and not prepared to fight it.

The answer was simple: they did not know how to fight.

Palfrey pressed his hand against his forehead, to try to still the aching. He felt utterly and terribly alone, had never felt so nearly hopeless. No one would fight, and if the nations would not help themselves, how could he help them?

Should he even try?

Wasn't the wise as well as the simple thing to go along with "them" like everyone else?

That question kept cropping up in his mind, but there was only one possible answer. In a way anything he did might be as futile as Debrett's gesture, but at least Debrett had not simply caved in.

A gesture was no use from him, however. There must be something he could do. There must—

He heard Stefan move, glanced up, and saw the big man rubbing his eyes. Palfrey didn't speak. Stefan stifled

a yawn, rubbed his eyes again, and looked across at Palfrey with the blank, almost stupid expression which often comes on waking.

"My goodness," he said thickly. "I must have dropped off."

"Yes," Palfrey agreed heavily. "You dropped off, Stefan."

After a pause, the other remarked: "You look tired."

"Yes, I am."

"What time—" Stefan glanced at his watch, and then said in astonishment: "It is after four! I must have been asleep for five or six hours!" He struggled to an upright position in the chair. "And I came here to help!" When Palfrey didn't respond, he frowned and went on: "Sap, what is it? Didn't they keep their promise to the girl?"

"Girl?" Palfrey echoed. "What girl? I—oh, Ida." He gave a short, mirthless laugh. "Oh, yes, they kept their word to Ida, but that happened so long ago that I'd forgotten it." He stood up, went to all the speaker-vents in the wall and closed them, closed and locked the door, and then sat on the edge of his desk and told Stefan exactly what had happened. Within seconds, Stefan was wide awake. After a while he stood up and joined Palfrey, who talked without vehemence while telling the story in great detail.

He omitted just one thing: the truth about Debrett. Debrett, he said, had simply gone out of the room and he had decided it was better not to stop him.

Stefan said slowly: "So we have lost, Sap. Now the only possibility is to work with them."

Palfrey felt as if he had a stone inside his breast, not a heart.

"It looks like it," he made himself say.

"Do you have any doubt at all?" asked Stefan.

"I hate admitting it," Palfrey mumbled.

"Of course you do—we all do. But it has to be faced," Stefan declared flatly.

"Yes," Palfrey agreed. He braced himself and actually forced a smile. "It's happened, yes. Now we have to find out what they want us to do."

"Sap," said Stefan, "why don't you get some sleep? I've had all I need, and I can look after things here."

"A good idea," Palfrey said, forcing himself to sound natural. "I think Joyce—" He broke off as there was a buzz at the passage door. Everything that mattered had been done, now, it was no longer important who heard what was said. He opened the door, and Joyce came in, fresh-faced, freshly made-up, obviously rested, showing none of the signs of distress and anxiety which she had shown before dropping off to sleep. "Hallo, Joyce," Palfrey said. "Stefan's had a nap, too. You must both be hungry," he added inconsequently. He did not know what to say, for there was nothing he could say.

"I've asked Emily to have some food sent along," Joyce said. "It will be here in a moment." She smiled at Palfrey almost gaily. "Sap, I've been thinking very deeply, and I've reached a simple conclusion. It really isn't any use fighting a losing battle. This war was over before it was begun. It makes the six-day Israeli-Arabian war seem like a long-drawn-out campaign!" She hoisted herself on to the desk, and swung her legs. "If you can't beat them, join them. I've come to the conclusion that that's what we ought to do."

Stefan was smiling broadly in approval; Palfrey was smiling too, a blank, unamused smile.

"That's what Stefan says," he remarked. "If we can't beat them, join them. It's the obvious thing to do."

He was thinking: there must be some way I can stop it. There must be.

There was a tap at the door, and a middle-aged woman came in, one of the older members of Z5 who now worked in the catering department. She looked pleasant and neat, said little as she placed coffee, bacon

and eggs, butter and cream on a table near the panel wall, and then went out. Palfrey saw the others begin to eat with gusto. No appetite was impaired, no remorse or heart-searching came with the change of attitude. All was accepted naturally.

Except by Debrett, he reminded himself.

And except by himself, Stanislaus Alexander Palfrey.

"Not hungry, Sap?" asked Stefan.

"No," Palfrey said. "But I'll have a cup of coffee." He poured out, added cream, and then turned to the door. "I don't know what time she gets up," he said, "but I'm going to see Mercia Harvey-Lee."

Neither of the others commented. He went up in the lift, wearing a cap and a scarf and a heavy coat. It was after five o'clock, pitch dark and piercingly cold, worse, if anything, than it had been the night before. No, not the night before; this night. A few hours ago.

He could go in the car which was waiting with another driver; or he could walk. Was it crazy even to think of walking? He stood in the warmth of the hotel lobby, looking out. He wanted to be on his own, because that way he could be safe. No one could even guess what he was thinking, and in truth he was almost afraid to think or to speak in case he gave himself away.

Stefan and Joyce had been brain-washed in their sleep, obviously victims of *Dio*-2. If they could be, anyone could be, *including himself.*

He thought with a sudden sense of shock, almost in disbelief: *why haven't I been brain-washed?*

Very slowly he went out of the revolving doors and away from the warmth into the bleak iciness of the winter night, and there was only one question in his mind.

Why hadn't they brain-washed him?

And then another question grew, very slowly but very vividly.

*Had they tried and failed?*

# 17

# "THEM"

As Palfrey left the hotel he heard the harsh note of engines, and when he turned into Piccadilly he saw snow-ploughs and bulldozers working to clear the huge banks of snow. No other traffic was about. The light was white and sharp with a bright luminosity, as he crossed the road and entered the park, open at night during the snow emergency. He felt less frozen, and was walking with greater freedom, as if some burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He did not think of that. The beauty of the frozen snow on the branches, reflecting the street lights and the big flood-lights brought up for the workmen, had an other-world look.

He reached the exit near Hyde Park Corner. Here, the snow clearing had been finished. A police patrol car crawled over sand-strewn road surface, and slowed down as he approached. They did not call or go towards him. There was a short cut to Donegal Square along an alley but as this was heavily blocked with snow, he passed, taking the longer way round. At major road junctions men and machines were working racously, but the squares were still and quiet.

Donegal Square was less brightly lighted than most, but there were lights at the window of Number 17. As he reached the porch he felt calmer than he had done for some time. He understood very well why. He was utterly alone, could confide in no one, could expect help from no one—except possibly from young Debrett.

He rang the bell, heard hurrying footsteps and a moment later the door was opened by Ida.

"Good gosh!" she exclaimed. "You!"

"Didn't you expect me?" asked Palfrey.

"Not of your own volition—we thought you would come when we told you to. At least, Aunt Mercia did." She stood aside. "As a matter of fact we thought it was Uncle Victor. He's in England!"

Victor Harvey-Lee, then, was expected home at long last.

Palfrey took off his coat and Ida put it in the cloakroom, then ran upstairs ahead of him. She behaved with remarkable naturalness, without giving the slightest indication of the pressures she had been under.

"Aunt Mercia!" she called. "It's Dr. Palfrey."

Not "Sap", now.

Almost immediately there was a movement at the head of the stairs and Mercia Harvey-Lee appeared. She wore the same dress she had worn earlier, but with a white lace stole over her shoulders. She smiled with genuine warmth of welcome, and as Ida darted into the big room, she held out both her hands. Palfrey felt himself drawn towards her and held for a moment; to his astonishment, he did not experience any revulsion.

She let him go.

"You do understand now, Sap, don't you? You do see its inevitability."

"Oh, yes," he said. "And even if I didn't, everyone else does."

"I know. We've just had messages from Moscow, Peking and Washington. Have *you* brought word from Whitehall?"

"Of a kind," Palfrey said. "They'll play." He didn't go into details, but asked: "Did Ida imply that there's a meeting of your—your leaders?"

"Exactly the word," said Mercia. "We are all very excited because my husband is due at any minute, and then we'll all be together. Come and meet the others." It was like being invited into a house-party.

Palfrey had no clear idea what to expect when he stepped inside, and had no real surprises.

There were three men, one standing, two getting out of their chairs. The man standing was Augustus Dioll, a small, compact man with a nearly bald head, a big mouth with pale lips and rather protruding teeth: it was easy to see from where Ida had inherited her "looks". One of the men getting to his feet was a stranger; taller, distinguished-looking and vaguely familiar.

The other man was Mr. Justice Graven, who was smiling very broadly.

"I think you know Sir Joseph Graven," said Mercia. "But have you met Professor Dioll—Dr. Palfrey. And Mr. Gordon Savage."

"Hallo, Sap," said Joe Graven.

"Dr. Palfrey," Dioll said, formally.

"I'm very glad to know you, Dr. Palfrey," Savage said. He had a pleasing voice, which Palfrey placed as from North or South Carolina, and came forward, hand outstretched. "I'm delighted you are going to work with us."

"We were always sure you would," said Graven. "I promised them!"

"Do sit down," Mercia said. "Will you have some brandy?"

"Thank you, no," said Palfrey. "But if there's coffee going I'd like some." He sat down, furthest from the fire, and looked levelly at Graven. "How long have you been involved, Joe?"

"Getting on for two months," Graven answered. "The other morning I was trying to find out whether you knew anything about the real significance of *Dio* or not. You didn't, did you?"

"No."

There was a flurry of footsteps on the stairs as Ida ran down to open the front door. Dioll murmured: "This will be Victor." Mercia moved towards the door, without attempting to conceal her eagerness. Savage came across

and stood close to Palfrey. The front door opened, a man spoke, and then Ida's voice sounded clearly.

"Dr. Palfrey is here."

"That's very good," the man said. "Is everyone else here, too?"

"Yes, all of them," Ida answered.

A moment later the door opened and Victor Harvey-Lee stepped into the room.

He was a tall, powerful-looking man, with fine features, and he looked the absolute picture of health. His wife went close to him, her arms outstretched as they had been towards Palfrey. For a moment they hugged each other, then Harvey-Lee kissed his wife on both cheeks. None of the others were even slightly surprised but Palfrey was quite stunned.

For this man was an albino; pink-skinned, pink-eyed white haired. He could almost be a man from another planet.

"Now you see why I had to hide," said Harvey-Lee. "Hide until the moment came when I could lead a world divided by colour, creeds and race. Now, with the help of our drugs, all these prejudices, these hates, all deeds of violence will be forbidden and will die, and I shall lead a world in which all men of all colours are equal."

I should have guessed, thought Palfrey, in anguish. But he had not, and he reminded himself that he had hardly known of the existence of the man or the woman until forty-eight hours ago. It was no use saying he should have; no use saying that Z5 should have known that Harvey-Lee was an albino. The secret had been kept with the thoroughness of everything these people did. He was glad of a few moments to conceal his surprise and was quite composed when Harvey-Lee turned towards him, and stretched out his hand.

"I understand you perfectly," said Palfrey.

"I was sure you would. I'm delighted you're with us, Dr. Palfrey."

"Thank you," Palfrey said.

"You were the one remaining danger," Harvey-Lee went on, and stepped to the fire, spreading his hands. "You were the one man we feared most."

Palfrey shrugged, and said self-deprecatingly: "I can't think why."

"You could have forced us to use violence everywhere," Harvey-Lee said, "and none of us wanted any more than was necessary. There is such crudeness about violence, so much of the primitive." He shot a humorous glance at Savage. "Isn't there, Gordon?"

Savage laughed.

"There most certainly is."

"And there isn't the slightest need for any more, now," went on Harvey-Lee. He was as matter of fact as all of the others, and had made this more, not less, of a family — social group. "I was deeply troubled about yesterday afternoon, but there was no alternative at all." He smiled at Palfrey as if for understanding. "Had you taken over the hotel and our works there you might have salvaged enough *Dio*-1 and *Dio*-2 to hit back—enough to justify you trying to make a fight of it. That was the last thing we wanted." He moved backwards from the heat of the fire, and sat down in an armchair nearly large enough for Stefan. "But for this afternoon it would have been virtually a bloodless victory—the first in the history of the world."

"A single aeroplane crash could do as much harm as we did today," interjected Gordon Savage. "You could still call it a bloodless victory—if Dr. Palfrey will co-operate."

Palfrey glanced at him, without giving the slightest indication of his sudden flare of interest.

"And how do you want me to co-operate?" He sounded almost lazy as he drawled the words.

"There are a hundred nations," Harvey-Lee said, "and we have infiltrated them all, but we have limited

supplies of *Dio*-2, the drug we administered to Andromo
vitch and Miss Morgan. In fact we have enough only fo
a few countries, those Big Powers who are to meet u
soon. In the others there will be bloodshed when w
begin to take over, unless you will help us."

"Oh," Palfrey said. "How can I?"

"These nations have absolute trust in you," Harvey
Lee said. "Z5 is the one organisation universally re
spected. If you send messages to all the leaders of na
tions assuring them that there is no need to fight, that n
nations will be taken over, I believe they will heed you
If they don't—if you fail to convince them—there will b
massacre upon massacre, and the killing could go on fo
months.

"We do not want such slaughter, Dr. Palfrey, and w
believe you have it in your hands to prevent it." Harvey
Lee paused, drew himself up to his full height, and wen
on: "It is a very grave responsibility to rest upon th
shoulders of one man. But if you carry it well, then in
deed we *could* call this battle for the world a bloodles
victory."

Except for those who had died, thought Palfrey. Ex
cept for the millions who would die that others coul
live in plenty. He did not speak or move and it seemed
long time before anyone else stirred. Then:

"Could *you* call it bloodless, Dr. Palfrey?" asked Pro
fessor Dioll.

It was the first hint of dissension, which showed
much in the way Dioll spoke as in the question itsel
There was challenge in his manner; scepticism—eve
disbelief.

Palfrey said: "No, I couldn't."

"That's honest, anyway," remarked Savage, with sati
faction.

"If we're to work together we have to be honest wit
one another," Palfrey remarked, and his right han
strayed towards his hair. "I think yesterday was ve

bloody indeed and if civil war starts in any nation over your attempted coup, it will be bloodier, but I don't mind that so much as I dislike the way you win your bloodless victories." He was twisting a strand of hair round his finger, and smiling.

He was thinking of everything Harvey-Lee had said, particularly of the last, loaded statement. The responsibility was too awful to contemplate, yet it was inescapably his.

"You are not really with us, are you?" Dioll asked.

"Gus, *please* don't jump to conclusions," Mercia pleaded.

Her husband was looking very straight at Palfrey; so was Graven. Only Gordon Savage seemed a little embarrassed, and moved towards the window. Palfrey was still twisting his hair round his forefinger, still smiling, still feeling the weight of that burden, and the dreadful choice. He had either to go along with what these men were doing, or condemn the world to fearful slaughter of the innocents.

"I have to admit defeat," he said hesitantly. "I have to come to terms, if I can. I don't pretend I relish it or agree with it, but I have to make the best I can of the situation. If you want more than I can give—" he shrugged—"then I will tell you. There are things I can live with and things I can't."

"Can and will you use your influence with these nations?" demanded Dioll.

"Undoubtedly, if I could live with the general conditions," Palfrey answered. "I can't as things are."

"And what are the things you can't live with?" Harvey-Lee asked, still in an easy, matter of fact voice.

"Brain-washing," Palfrey said, simply.

"But it has been by a particularly effective form of brain-washing that we have won," cried Savage, breaking his calm for the first time. "You must know that."

"I know it well," Palfrey said. "When is it going to stop?"

No one answered. There was the sound of feet approaching and Palfrey heard the chink of cups. Ida was bringing in coffee and sandwiches. She smiled her thanks at him as he opened the door, then slowly became aware of the tension. She darted a scared look round, put the tray on a low table and hurried out. The door shut.

"What are you implying?" asked Palfrey mildly. "That it's never going to stop?"

"How *can* it stop?" asked Mercia. "Sap, please don't—"

"I think I can see what is worrying Dr. Palfrey." Harvey-Lee interrupted his wife, and gave a charming smile. "Of course, the time will have to come when there is no need for our form of brain-washing, or mind control. And when there is no need there will be no purpose in it."

"*Is* that what you mean?" asked Dioll.

"If I know Sap Palfrey, he means much more than that," declared Graven. "Out with it, Sap."

"Yes," Palfrey said, still in a faraway voice. "You call this war—and it has been a war. You have the world at your feet. You've discovered or produced drugs which enable you to make men think as you want them to and behave as you want them to. Given time you'll have everything you need. This isn't really new, though. Much the same thing has been done before, only without drugs. The chief weapon of the past has been fear. But in all the great conquests there has come a time when it is no longer necessary to rule by creating fear—when men become free again. I may have lost a war," he went on with an amiable smile, "but I haven't lost love of freedom."

When he finished there was another long, tense silence. His mouth was dry and he glanced at the coffee but no one seemed to notice and Mercia made no move

Harvey-Lee was nearest him but Dioll, in a far corner, seemed to lend menace.

"Freedom," Graven said drily, "is a matter of degree."

"Freedom to think what you like shouldn't be," Palfrey said.

"You *are* against us, aren't you?" demanded Dioll. "You hate us."

"Dr. Palfrey, I was so sure that you had seen the need for what we are doing," Savage said, obviously distressed.

"What exactly *are* you doing?" demanded Palfrey, more roughly than before. "Planning to halve the world's population so that there is enough of everything to go round? Even if one can accept the intellectual aspect of it, and the practicality, and can overlook the moral aspect, how are you going to kill the doomed half? Bloodlessly, I presume, since you are so sensitive to the sight of blood."

"Sap, please——" Mercia began, but he cut across her words.

"Well, aren't you? Tell me how you are going to kill them!"

"They will not suffer," Harvey-Lee said quietly.

"They won't know they're going to die," said Dioll.

"Sap," said Graven, more earnestly than he had spoken before. "You can't save their lives. I thought you realised that, I thought that was why you came here."

"Oh, I can't stop you," Palfrey said. "You've virtually taken over Z5. You've virtually taken over the governments of the major powers. You've infiltrated with the biggest fifth column in history, and there's no defence against it. But that doesn't mean I have to help you to the bloodless victory. 'If you can't beat them join them,' isn't a slogan which appeals to me, and it's never likely to. If you've terms to offer and I can accept them, I will. I can't, I won't."

Into the following silence, Dioll said grudgingly: "I a
ways thought he was the stuff of martyrs."

"Don't be a damned fool, Sap," Graven said. "You'll b
one of the world's leaders."

"Dr Palfrey, you can prevent an infinite amount
human suffering," Savage declared in a muted voice.

Palfrey thought: yes, I can. He was faced with an ap
palling choice. The wisdom of a thousand Solomo
could not help in such a decision. He was casting roun
desperately in his mind for something which might
least gain time, and the glimmering of an idea grew.

"Dr Palfrey," Harvey-Lee said. "What are *yo*
terms?"

He smiled as he spoke, and Palfrey did not think h
had ever seen a man with more perfect features. He ha
the look of Stefan, in some indefinable way. There w
something else, too; a kind of authority as well as powe
and of all the men present he was undoubtedly th
leader. It was strange for Palfrey to be standing in th
lovely room, his back to the door, the others gathere
roughly in a half-circle in front of him, all touched b
the firelight. It was stranger to see how Graven, Sava
and Mercia seemed to drop into the background an
only Harvey-Lee and Dioll really seemed significant.

Slowly, deliberately, Palfrey said: "An oasis
freedom."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Harvey-L
quickly.

"He means a spring-board from which to fight bac
interpolated Dioll.

"Sap, use your head," pleaded Graven.

"I mean a place where a community can live in co
plete freedom, isolated from your world," said Palfr
"If I could command it, I would say Australia—but y
will probably say that Australia is too large. Any islan
any part of the world where living can be possible, and

few thousand families can enable man to live with himself and think for himself."

"And arm himself," Dioll rasped.

"No," Palfrey said. "If I do what you want, and it succeeds, it would probably be the end of fighting, of brutality and self-destruction. But I don't think men will ever reach their full stature if their minds are controlled —I think they can only thrive in freedom. You can have your technology and your space age, your nuclear power, everything the world has now. Free men won't envy you those things if they can be assured of freedom. If I have absolute assurance of such an oasis, then I will co-operate with you. If I don't—then I won't." After a pause, he gave one of his brightest smiles, and added: "It really is as simple as that."

Immediately, Harvey-Lee asked: "And supposing we won't guarantee your terms, Dr. Palfrey?"

"Then I won't help you," Palfrey said. "You will be surprised how many will prefer a bloodbath to your kind of destruction; how many will think freedom worth fighting for."

He turned his back on them and stepped towards the door.

"What we ought to do is kill him now," Professor Dioll said roughly.

# 18

# DECISION

If they killed him, then he had failed.

If they did not kill him, then it would prove their desperate need of him; and if there was such need, there must be a weakness in their position which he did not suspect. It was a weakness to have to depend on him at all, but there was something much more than that. He thought Dioll was very conscious of it, and fearful that he, Palfrey, should quickly realise what this weakness was. If that were so, then they were very vulnerable indeed—yet he had not the slightest idea where. He continued to walk towards the door. Every second seemed age-long, and his heart lurched sickeningly within him.

Every second was of vital importance, too; every moment they delayed proved their need of him. He no longer needed telling why they had not killed him before, why they had frightened him, why Mercia had tried to seduce him. Their need might be as simple as the one they had given: that he could restrain nations from starting to fight back.

He was at the door.

He thought, they can't expect me to hold off nations for long, so they need time, too.

He touched the handle.

Time for what? he asked himself in anguish. *Why did they need so desperately to buy time?*

He opened the door.

"If you don't kill him," Dioll said, "I will."

"Gus!" cried Mercia. "Put that away!"

So Dioll had a weapon. Of them all, Dioll was most afraid of what he could do if he were allowed to live.

What could he do? Except fail them, by refusing to intercede with the smaller nations.

"Palfrey, if you move another step I will shoot you," Dioll said.

"If you kill me, I can't co-operate on any terms," Palfrey pointed out. "I will be at my office." He had not moved again, and stayed motionless as he went on: "The British Prime Minister was assassinated this evening. Someone disapproved of his readiness to co-operate. Good morning, gentlemen."

He opened the door and stepped to one side.

If Dioll fired, he had no chance at all—and he clenched his teeth and gripped his hands with excruciating tension. He felt sweat on his forehead and upper lip, but he stepped outside without haste, and did not trouble to close the door.

Graven exclaimed: "Assassinated? *Hall?*"

"Give me that gun, Gus," said Harvey-Lee.

"Who killed him?" demanded Savage. His footsteps sounded on the floor as he came running. "Palfrey! Who killed him?"

Palfrey answered without turning round. "One of the men who will lead bloody resistance however careful you are."

Savage started to call again but broke off. Palfrey reached the foot of the stairs as Ida appeared from the cloakroom with his cap and coat. She helped him on with it, and spoke in a husky voice.

"I didn't think anyone could be so brave."

"Do *you* know why your father is so afraid?" Palfrey asked.

"No," she said. "No." In a whisper she added: "I'm so glad he didn't kill you—so glad."

She opened the door and Palfrey stepped into the cold again. It was nearly daylight, so it must be eight o'clock,

and there was no wind. He walked away, knowing there was still time for them to shoot him from the door or from a window. A car, parked along the street, started up and moved towards him. His back was towards it, he seemed to have had his back turned towards death for an endless time.

The car pulled up, and the Jamaican driver jumped out.

"In you get, sir! Miss Morgan sent me," he added as Palfrey got in. "She thought you'd be glad of a lift."

"Yes," Palfrey said. "I'm very grateful." He sank back in the car and began to shiver, and for a long time he was like a man with ague. His teeth chattered, while his whole body shook in a macabre accompaniment. Reaching the hotel, the driver, in sudden concern, helped him down.

"Are you okay, sir?"

"Got too cold, that's all," Palfrey muttered. "I'll be all right."

But he was a long way from all right when he reached the lift door, and because of the reaction he did not trust himself to face Joyce or Stefan. He wanted to be on his own, to fight this out by himself. He let the driver take him up to the penthouse, and as he reached it the door opened and one of the older members of the Z5 staff stood aside.

"Bed," Palfrey said. "Switch everything off."

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes. Quite all right."

But he allowed the woman to follow him into the bedroom, take off his shoes, and loosen his collar. The room was warm, and for a while he lay under the blankets, too hot but quite sure that warmth was good for him. He closed his eyes, and dozed. He thought vaguely that if he were wanted "they" could come for him. And if they wanted him at 10 Downing Street, they could send for

him also. The doze drifted into sleep, dreamless and deep. He was unaware of time.

In the four hours during which Palfrey slept, much happened in the land and throughout the world. In London, Martindale and other members of the Cabinet met in an emergency meeting; a message was sent to the Queen who was in residence at Buckingham Palace, while the Commissioner at Scotland Yard and the Chief of the Special Branch there were summoned. By the time dawn broke, an announcement of the assassination had been made to the Press, and it was broadcast on the early news. The Queen sent for Martindale to form a new administration, and he reappointed all the ministers. He announced at the same time that he was going to carry out the same policies as Reginald Hall. His first official action was to confirm his readiness to attend a summit conference.

Debrett was named as the chief suspect, and special telecasts showed his photograph to millions.

During this same period, Harvey-Lee and the others at 17 Donegal Square, had a long, intense discussion on whether to go and see Palfrey in the morning.

"He'll never give in," Dioll said. "If he pretends to, it will only be to fool us. God knows how, but he's immune to both *Dio*-1 and *Dio*-2—he's been given it in his food at the H.Q., I'm sure the Townsend woman wouldn't lie to me—yet he's immune. I only met it once before, in an African girl."

"Why do you oppose Palfrey so much?" asked Mercia. "Why are you so sure the rest of us are wrong?"

"He should have given in a long time ago," Dioll said. "I tell you he is the only man I have ever known who remains unaffected by *Dio* in any form. I don't know how. It may be his particular metabolism, or he may have developed a high degree of psychological protection—or

he may know much more than we realise." After a pause, Dioll went on: "While that man lives, we are in danger."

Harvey-Lee said reasoningly: "Gus, if he joins us we can do in a few days what it might otherwise take us years to do. We have to try."

They voted, and Dioll was the only dissenter.

Making no comment, he turned and went up to his room on the top floor.

And in a tiny apartment in Fulbright Mews, Debrett dozed fitfully, huddled under a mountain of coats and blankets, his murder weapon by his side.

Down in the headquarters of Z5, Joyce Morgan and Stefan Andromovitch went over the reports, and as more and more came in, the hopelessness of their position became more and more apparent. They accepted it, and were worried only in case Palfrey would not. They were together in Joyce's office just before eight o'clock. At last, the spate of messages had slackened, only one or two new ones were coming over the huge computer, and the analysis of reports was on Joyce's desk. The morning shift in the Operations Room had just come on duty, but the general attitude was mechanical, and there were no excitements.

A telephone buzzed.

"What is it?" asked Joyce. There was a pause. "Very well." She put the receiver down, and neither of them noticed the subtle change in her manner. Instead of "thank you" it was a curt "very well". She told Stefan: "Sap is coming." There was another pause, before she added: "I hope he is not going to be too difficult."

"The one certain thing about Sap is his realism," Stefan declared. "He may hate it, but he will never fight the inevitable."

Palfrey heard that remark while in his office.

He knew that word had been sent ahead of his arrival,

that everyone knew he was here. Yet no one took any particular notice; most whom he passed either nodded or grunted. They knew what was going on, yet accepted the situation dourly. He had known times of crisis when the situation for the world had seemed hopeless, and had been aware of the hopeful gaze of everyone in Z5, when they had looked towards him to work a miracle, and been quite sure he would try. Now, they simply accepted the worst.

Then he heard Joyce say: "I hope he is not going to be too difficult."

The words came over the communications line very faintly; she must be some distance away from her desk, unaware that she was connected to his room and that his loudspeaker was switched on.

"The one certain thing about Sap is his realism," Stefan said; his voice was stronger, so he was near the desk. "He may hate it, but he will never fight the inevitable."

There could be no further proof that both of them had accepted the domination of "them"—their will to fight had been destroyed. It could only be by drug, by *Dio*-2, but—why wasn't *he* affected? He could have been drugged, just as easily as they, more easily than Stefan, in fact, who had been in London so short a time.

Had Harvey-Lee deliberately planned this?

There seemed no point in the man adopting such an attitude, and Dioll certainly had not shared it. Now that he was alone in the office, Palfrey concentrated on this mystery, and on another. Why were they "in such a hurry"? If they could do what they had done to the leaders of the big powers, surely it was only a matter of time before they could work on the smaller ones. Why were they so desperate for his help now?

"We'll go and see him," Joyce decided.

Palfrey switched off the loudspeaker and looked at the messages and reports on his desk. Routine had not been interrupted; but for what had happened and he had

heard, this would have seemed a normal morning. The mass of reports were summarised, and there were other reports about completely different things—a revolution in a small South American state, some mysterious phenomena in the growth rate of children in a Rumanian village, a rumour that there was an enormous labour camp in the Arctic not controlled by any nation. Such reports were almost commonplace, and normally Palfrey would contact nearby agents or send investigators from the nearest Regional Headquarters, from London, Washington or Moscow. He was putting these aside when the door opened and Stefan and Joyce entered.

"Good morning, Sap!"

"Hallo," said Palfrey mildly. "'Morning, Joyce. Sleep well?"

"Enough," Joyce answered, almost tartly. "How about you?"

"Much rested," said Palfrey. "And very reflective."

"What have you decided?" Joyce wanted to know.

"I haven't decided anything," Palfrey said. "I wanted to discuss it with you."

"Sap, I don't think we have any choice at all," Stefan stated with absolute confidence. He stood in front of the desk, towering over Palfrey, almost as if trying to intimidate him. "The summit conference has been set for Friday, in Algiers. Martindale has become your new Prime Minister, and he will be there. If all the big powers agree that there is no other course, we have to accept."

Palfrey began to twist a strand of hair.

"It looks like it," he conceded.

"Sap, you can't have any serious doubt," Joyce protested, obviously trying to speak quietly—as obviously having difficulty in keeping her temper. "We must put the whole of the resources of Z5 at their disposal. We don't have any choice. And you must make the decision *now*."

*Why haven't I been brain-washed, too?* Palfrey was asking himself. *And why is there such a hurry?*

Andromovitch still loomed over him, and Joyce drew closer: he could see that her hands were clenched, she was affected much more than Stefan. Perhaps that was because she had been living on her nerves for so long. Palfrey leaned back, then spoke with brisk certainty.

"Yes. We can't put off a decision any longer. Are you both quite sure you want to work with them?"

'I certainly want to," Joyce said. "It's obviously the best thing that could happen to the world."

She did not appear to have any idea of the monstrous nature of the thing she was saying.

"Sap," Stefan said. "I've considered every possible angle and I don't think we have any choice at all."

Palfrey had known times when Stefan would have suffered any torture, any kind of torment, in the defence of freedom; would have died rather than condemn any man to the fate "they" had in store for half mankind.

"So you would work with them whether they will give us this oasis of freedom or not?"

'You know the oasis is only a dream," Joyce said. "It's hopelessly impracticable. I can't understand you, Sap—you've changed so much."

*He* had changed!

"I think they will agree to the suggestion," Stefan said. "It may not seem practicable now but it will be well worth trying."

Palfrey looked from one to the other, and then said decisively:

"Right! If they will give me that island, and if they will leave us in charge of Z5 so that we continue to work under their aegis, all right. Why don't they come here and tell us exactly what they want?"

Joyce's face lit up.

Stefan put a hand on Palfrey's shoulder and pressed heavily.

"I am sure it is the right decision, Sap. Will you get in touch with Harvey-Lee, or shall I?"

"You," said Palfrey. "If the world's to go on wagging, we've got to see what's going on, and there are some new problems in this morning. Will you get ready to receive them, Joyce?"

She was obviously intensely excited, and Palfrey was vividly reminded of the way Ida had behaved when she had heard that all would be well if she went back to Donegal Square. She darted forward and kissed Palfrey, then turned and ran out of the office.

Stefan was smiling broadly.

"No doubt what she feels about it, is there?" he remarked. "I'll see you, Sap."

He went out and closed the door.

Palfrey thought: *Why don't I feel as they do? And why is there such a hurry?*

He felt a strange exhilaration and in a way this was like the others, but the cause was very different. He knew his own strength and his own weakness, and he had made his decision.

He would not work with these men.

And he was the only man in the world who could destroy them, but in order to do so he needed them here.

As far as he could judge, they were eager to come.

"Sap," Joyce said over the speaker, a few minutes later, "they will be here at twelve noon."

# 19

# THE BROADCAST

Twelve noon British Standard Time . . .

One o'clock in the afternoon, in Western Europe, and two o'clock further east. Two o'clock in Cairo and five o'clock in Bombay. In Hong Kong it was eight o'clock and in Tokyo, just after nine. Across the Atlantic, it was much earlier. Twelve noon in London, nine in the morning in Rio de Janeiro, seven in New York and four in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The closed circuit television at Z5 was showing the Operations Room.

The world had been alerted for a relay, through Eurovision and Telstar, on every system and channel. They were standing by in the palaces of kings and presidents and the meeting rooms of cabinets, the boardrooms of industry and commerce and in schoolrooms, everywhere.

Above the Operations Room, the approaches to the hotel had been cleared completely of snow, and dried by special heaters. At half-past eleven, the sky was still overcast and a bitter east wind blew as a small cavalcade of cars approached the hotel. A few police lined the route, but there were no special precautions. Palfrey sat down in his office and watched the screen, seeing the occupants of the first car—Victor and Mercia Harvey-Lee. In the next was Savage, Dioll and Graven, in the third, Ida Smith and two men whom Palfrey did not know.

Palfrey and Stefan watched the crowd, getting a little larger, now, as if rumour had spread that this visit was worth braving the cold. Most of the people were elderly, but there were a few teenagers. The doorways were

crowded with sightseers sheltering from the wind, and only a few lined the pavement as the cars neared the hotel.

Palfrey saw one man, huddled up, hands thrust deep into his pockets, cap pulled low over his eyes. Palfrey frowned. The cameras changed their angle slightly and the man's profile showed.

It was young Debrett.

Palfrey pressed the bell which connected him with the front door of the hotel, watching closely. A man answered. Palfrey saw Debrett moving slowly forward, right hand less deep in his pocket. The first car drew near and stopped outside the hotel.

"Watch a man in the doorway of Number 16," Palfrey ordered. "He may have a gun."

"He's covered, sir," the agent answered.

Palfrey saw two others, also Z5 agents, step forward towards Debrett, and at that same moment Harvey-Lee was helped out of the car. Debrett made a quick move forward, then realised that he was being approached. He snatched a gun from his pocket and fired. At the same moment one of the Z5 men leapt, pushing his arm aside. Instantaneously, men were fighting and struggling and there was screaming in the nearest doorway.

Victor Harvey-Lee must have known the bullet was intended for him but he did not even glance round. Mercia did, and for a split-second it looked as if she were staring Palfrey straight in the face, recognising him. She looked alarmed but she did not slacken pace. They walked into the hotel, as Stefan said in a low-pitched voice:

"Was that the man who killed Reginald Hall?"

"Yes," Palfrey answered.

"You should never have let him go," Stefan said.

"No," agreed Palfrey. There was no point in arguing, and he smiled vaguely. "I can still make mistakes, you see."

"Don't make any now," Stefan warned. "The new Leader will rightly be merciless."

As he spoke, there was a close-up not of Harvey-Lee, who had just passed, but of Augustus Dioll. Until this moment Palfrey had not noticed how tight-stretched his lips were, nor how narrowed and bleak his eyes. As he disappeared there was a picture of Graven and Savage, followed by Ida.

"They will soon be here," Stefan remarked.

"Yes."

Palfrey stood up, rounded the desk, and led the way out of his room. He reached the Operations Room at ten minutes to twelve, and as he did so Joyce came from the other direction. Just behind her came Mercia and Victor Harvey-Lee. Palfrey knew that they were visible on the closed circuit, but the worldwide link up had not yet been made.

Harvey-Lee held out his hand. Palfrey shook it, bowed and smiled at Mercia, then motioned to the others and led the way into the big room. Ida smiled at him. Palfrey saw Savage's eyes light up, and needed no more telling that Savage was the Communications expert. He spoke under his breath.

"It is magnificent, Palfrey. Of its kind, the finest I have ever seen."

"Yes," Palfrey said. "On that transmitter we can send out messages simultaneously to several thousand agents." He motioned to chairs which had been placed in a semi-circle about the recording panel, and as the others settled down, went on: "After the broadcast, I will show you our laboratories, Professor." He pressed a switch in the floor and immediately the television eye was opened on to the huge underground laboratories, the hundreds of men working there. "No doubt you will want to be in charge," Palfrey went on. "It is chiefly for forensic research and investigation but can easily be converted."

Dioll's eyes were glistening as brightly as Savage's.

"Dr. Palfrey," said Harvey-Lee, "this broadcast is to be very short, and of course unrehearsed. The simpler the better, I think."

"I couldn't agree more," Palfrey answered.

"It is enough for you to introduce me as a unifying figure in the world, and to say that you, Dr. Palfrey, leader of Z5, have every confidence in me and what I am doing—and that all of your agents are to work in close co-operation with me. I want you to be very calm and matter of fact."

"I usually am," Palfrey said. "Do you wish to speak?"

"I want to make it clear that the world of tomorrow belongs to people of all races, colours and religions, there will be no barriers of segregation whether of wealth or knowledge, privilege by birth, or any other standard."

"Admirable." Palfrey glanced at the clock on the computer panel. It was one minute to twelve. "I think it is time for the hook-up." He saw lights glowing and knew that they were already being seen on screens all over Britain, and another light would tell him when they were linked to Europe. After a moment, a blue light showed that Telstar was now relaying the scene to the U.S.A.

Two cameras were turned towards him. A small man, the man in charge of the closed circuit system, gave a prearranged signal. Palfrey smiled vaguely into the camera . . .

Hundreds of millions of people saw him.

At their first glimpse, he seemed to be a rather vague, unimpressive individual, with his faint smile, and the wisp of hair which swept his forehead. The man standing beside him was far more impressive, fine-looking, strong, exuding the confidence of power. Even those to whom the albino pallor was strange could not fail to see this man's obvious qualities. Beside him, Palfrey seemed

a weakling, yet there was a pleasant directness about Palfrey's smile which grew on the watchers even in those few seconds.

"Hallo, everybody," Palfrey said, with a slightly music hall *compere* air. "I don't want to keep you long, but I do want to introduce Mr. Harvey-Lee"—the camera turned full-face on to the albino—"Professor Dioll, a truly great scientist and research worker,"—Dioll appeared, thin lips parted in a smile at the unexpected praise—"Mr. Gordon Savage, from South Carolina, who is a remarkable electronics engineer, and Mr. Justice Graven, one of the leading members of the British judiciary. These gentlemen—" he broke off, looking ludicrously apologetic. "I'm sorry, I'd forgotten *Mrs.* Harvey-Lee, Mercia"—he saw her appear full face in the monitor—"and Ida, Professor Dioll's daughter—" He wondered how Ida would react. She did the wise thing and sat absolutely still, without smiling. "This remarkable group of people have made a discovery which can change the future and the face of the world, and unlike any who have attempted to do the same thing, they seek a bloodless revolution. To achieve this they have asked for my support.

"You may well ask who am I to support or not to support such a revolutionary change in world affairs," Palfrey went on, in a stronger voice. "I will tell you, briefly." He paused, and there was a change in him, no one watching could now have the slightest doubt of the strength in this man. The camera drew closer, so that his face filled the whole of the screen. It was as if he were looking straight into the eyes of every man and woman and child who was watching. "My name is Palfrey—Dr. Palfrey. I have for many years been the acknowledged leader of a worldwide organisation, sponsored by and paid for by every nation in the world. *Every* single nation, even those which are at war with one another. The sponsors pay me and many thousands of agents in my department, called 5 Z—*Zee* 5, my American friends will

say!—to guard the world's security. To protect not single nations, for that is each sovereign nation's right—but our world as we know it. Threats to our world come from many and varied sources. The power now controlled by man could destroy us all, heeding no frontiers. Fire, nuclear explosion, drugs, gases, flood—these and many other dangers beset us. Any one of these things, controlled by men of ill-will, could destroy the world as we know it. And I rather like our world." Palfrey paused.

To the countless millions the remark and the smile which accompanied it brought a momentary release from tension, and they relaxed. Mercia smiled. So did Harvey-Lee. Dioll sat stony-faced, like the others.

"And I don't want to see it destroyed," Palfrey went on. "Nor do Mr. Harvey-Lee and his friends. They have discovered a drug which can so affect the minds of men that their attitudes and behaviour can be controlled. And at the same time—mark this, *at the same time*—they can so improve the physical health of men and women that none shall ever be too fat, and none shall ever be too lean!"

Again he smiled.

Again a smile (often with a chuckle) spread throughout the wide, wide world.

"They want no bloodshed," Palfrey went on, "although they can cause plenty, God knows. They can probably cause more bloodshed than anyone in history, but they do not wish to do so. They want me to assure you, the people who do not know me, and your leaders, who most certainly do, of their goodwill. To assure you that the sovereignty of each nation will be ensured, that there will be no fighting, and that there will be plenty of supplies and to spare to meet the needs of everyone who lives.

"This offers a remarkable world," continued Palfrey. "A world of which I have often dreamed, and my colleagues have long fought for. I have never known it so

near as it is now." He paused, and his expression changed subtly. "I wish I could live in such a world, but I cannot do so for a simple reason—man would have to give up his most precious heritage." Palfrey took an automatic pistol from his pocket, and levelled it at Dioll, who was rising from his chair. "I mean, the heritage of freedom," Palfrey went on. He smiled; very, very slowly. He could see horror on the faces of the leaders of "them"; he could see the horror on Joyce's face and on Stefan's—*but he saw great relief and radiance on Mercia Harvey-Lee's.* "I would rather die than give it up," said Palfrey. "I think most of you would, too. My advice to every leader among you is: seek out the traitors among you and banish or destroy them—as I am going to destroy their leaders now.

"Unless——"

He paused again. And now he seemed an enormous figure, filling the whole of the screen.

"Unless they give up here and now," he said with great incisiveness. "Unless they tell us who their agents are, where their drugs are, where their laboratories and their resources are. If they come to this microphone and tell the world, then they can live. And you who listen can seek out their agents and destroy the drugs, and we shall be much closer to one another than we have ever been before, because we will have lived through a common danger.

"You see Professor Dioll?" Palfrey continued, even softer-voiced. "You see the gun he is drawing? What he doesn't know, what no one else in the world knows, is that if I drop this microphone, if I release this switch, then this Operations Room and all the people in it will be blown to pieces. Not one among us could possibly survive."

## 20

# THE REASON FOR HASTE

As Palfrey's words came out, even Dioll drew back. With his gun half out of his pocket, he stood motionless. Harvey-Lee covered his face with his hands. Graven said something which sounded like: "So he fooled us, he *always* fools us." Savage slumped back in his chair. Ida was on her feet. Mercia—*Mercia*—was sitting still, with that radiance like an aura about her. Andromovitch was clutching Joyce, who was obviously appalled.

"You see, something like this was bound to happen some day," Palfrey went on. "The time might come when I could not rely on anyone but myself. So years ago I had this microphone prepared, one man making one piece, a second another, and I assembled the whole myself. And I assure you it will do exactly what I say." He turned to Harvey-Lee. "What is it to be, sir? Capitulation, an unconditional surrender, or destruction?"

Harvey-Lee, within arm's reach of Palfrey, did not speak. There was utter silence for what seemed an agelong time—and then Dioll sprang forward, raising his gun.

"Kill him," he cried. "Destroy him!"

There was a shudder of indrawn breath from every person in the room and all, outside, who knew that if the man reached Palfrey, the microphone would inevitably fall from Palfrey's hand.

Palfrey simply raised his gun and shot the raging man.

And into the fresh silence which followed, Harvey-Lee said in a whispering voice: "We must do what Palfrey says. Savage, tell them what to do."

"That's fine," said Palfrey, in his matter-of-fact way. "Use that microphone over there."

He pointed. He smiled at Mercia; and she was still radiant, as became the woman who in a way had become the mother of all mankind.

Afterwards, alone with her in his room, Palfrey asked: "How did you do it, Mercia? How did you protect me?"

"There is an antidote," Mercia told him. "If you take it then you are proof against *Dio*-1 and every by-product. All of the leaders have a supply. I gave you a little of mine in coffee when you first came to see me." She touched Palfrey's hand, and went on: "I meant all I said about how I believe man and woman should live, Sap. I believe in absolute freedom. But I did not see what I could do to stop them, so I let them believe I was in full agreement." She paused, then went on: "Sap—must you tell my husband this?"

"No," Palfrey said very quietly. "I shall tell no one, but forever bless you and the courage in you."

She turned slowly and moved towards the door.

Later, when questioning Harvey-Lee, Palfrey asked: "Why were you in such a hurry? If you'd gone much more slowly you might have pulled it off."

"It was not possible," Harvey-Lee said. "I think Ida had already told you that *Dio* was discovered in a reef off the West African Coast, and supplies were manufactured on board a ship fitted with a laboratory. It was commissioned for marine biology research. First some native women and later Professor Dioll lost weight quite dramatically when the ship was anchored at a certain spot. So did others, in a matter of two or three weeks. But away from that spot, Dioll put on weight again. He experimented and learned that the substance came from a certain very rare rock, found only at that one spot,

identifiable by a special limpet we had never seen before. He called the substance *Dio*—after Dioll, of course. He lost weight very quickly, but his temperament changed—from being a very amiable and good-natured man, he became harsh and over-bearing.

"Supplies of *Dio* were loaded on to the ship," went on Harvey-Lee, "but we discovered a small boat nearby, with a man obviously spying on us. He was, no doubt, your agent. Once we realised we were under surveillance we took extreme precautions to keep the secret——"

"We?" asked Palfrey.

"Ah, yes. I had met Professor Dioll years ago—we share an interest in marine biology, and I financed his expedition. He told me what he had found, and I put up the money, while he did the research. Very soon we realised the power *Dio* could give us, and we had no doubt of our ability to use that power.

"Then we ran into disaster," Harvey-Lee went on slowly. "There was an earth tremor, and the vital reef collapsed. The only known source of *Dio* was removed, and we were left with only the supplies on the ship—and very little time."

Palfrey hardly heard those last few words.

He was thinking of the missing agent, whose message had brought about the downfall of the men who would have ruled the world by killing half its people and controlling the minds of all who survived.

"And the effect of the by-product is short-lived, and soon wears off," Harvey-Lee was saying. "We thought its effectiveness in you was abnormally short, Palfrey. *Is* that how you came to stand out?"

Palfrey smiled: "I had help, of course. But you wouldn't expect me to reveal the secrets of Z5, would you?"

The strange thing was that Harvey-Lee laughed.

The wonderful thing was that twenty-four hours afterwards, Joyce and Stefan did not remember what they

had done nor how they had talked. They were present at the summit meeting which frightened leaders turned into a call for world disarmament which fell on ears no longer absolutely deaf. They were present, weeks later, when Harvey-Lee, Savage and Graven were exiled to a remote island, with Mercia and Ida and a few faithful followers who still believed.

And to Palfrey the island was an oasis not of freedom but of despotism. The oasis of freedom, that precious heritage, lived on in the unenslaved minds of mankind.

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